



eCOMMONS

Loyola University Chicago
Loyola eCommons

Dissertations

Theses and Dissertations

1989

The Restoration Theater World and the Plays of William Wycherley

Robert C. Neagle
Loyola University Chicago

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Neagle, Robert C., "The Restoration Theater World and the Plays of William Wycherley" (1989).
Dissertations. 2671.

https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/2671

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).
Copyright © 1989 Robert C. Neagle

THE RESTORATION THEATER WORLD AND THE PLAYS OF
WILLIAM WYCHERLEY

by

Robert C. Neagle

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Loyola
University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

April

1989

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to first acknowledge the encouragement, criticism and advice of Douglas White, John Shea, and Thomas Kaminski. Without their help, and that of Allen Frantzen, I would never have finished a project that I wanted desperately to complete.

I also thank my wife, Marilyn, and children, James, Katherine, and Elizabeth, for years of support, motivation, and understanding.

We did it!

VITA

The author, Robert Charles Neagle, is the son of Robert P. and Florence Schavone Neagle. He was born June 20, 1953, in Chicago, Illinois.

He graduated from St. Ignatious College Prep, Chicago, Illinois in 1971.

In September, 1971, Mr. Neagle entered North Central College, Naperville, Illinois, receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and History in June, 1975.

In September of 1975 Mr. Neagle was granted an assistantship in English at Loyola University of Chicago, where he received a Master of Arts in 1977.

While a Ph.D. candidate at Loyola, Mr. Neagle was inducted into Alpha Sigma Nu.

Mr. Neagle is presently Vice President of Corporate Communications for Bell Atlantic Capital Corp., an international provider of equipment leasing and financing and corporate financing services. He lives in River Edge, New Jersey with his wife, Marilyn, and their three children, James, Katherine and Elizabeth.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
VITA.....	iii
Chapter	
I. THE RESTORATION THEATER WORLD, 1660-1682.....	1
II. "MUDDLED LOVE: <i>LOVE IN A WOOD, OR ST. JAMES PARK</i> ".....	93
III. <i>THE GENTLEMAN DANCING MASTER</i> : SPECTACLE FOR THE CITY.....	134
IV. <i>THE COUNTRY WIFE</i> : NEW RULES FOR WIT.....	168
V. <i>THE PLAIN DEALER</i> : TOO MUCH SELF-RELIANCE.....	213
VI. CONCLUSION.....	260
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	265

CHAPTER I

THE RESTORATION THEATER WORLD, 1660-1682

Since the 1680's, the subject of Restoration comedy has generated a plethora of comment and critical controversy. While most of the discussion is about the plays, notably those of Etherege, Dryden, Wycherley and Congreve, all usually included under the rubric "restoration dramatists," the commentary itself has also become a significant critical subject. Because so much of the criticism attempts to recreate an audience, a theoretical environment, a theatrical history, and because much of it makes or accepts assumptions advanced by others, it requires periodic review and critical scrutiny. Even an admittedly general review of the commentary sufficiently illustrates that descriptions of the Restoration milieu, or that of a particular writer like Wycherley, seriously affect the evaluation of the plays.

Although Jeremy Collier did not single out Wycherley in his *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698), Wycherley's plays have traditionally been grouped with the "comedy of manners" plays that Collier attacked. Because of the "Collier controversy" and the seventeenth and eighteenth century commonplace belief that the

purpose of art was to instruct, early critics tended to ask moral questions about Wycherley's drama, often finding the plays morally deficient. Early nineteenth century critics rebelled against these tendencies by placing the plays in what they thought were their historical contexts. Charles Lamb's attempts to avoid imposing a new age's critical standards on Restoration comedy, for example, concluded with his substituting a "Utopia of gallantry; a society without reference to the world that is"¹ for the beau monde of seventeenth century England. William Hazlitt, later joined by Leigh Hunt, was interested in seeing the plays as the products of an age, as a "more exquisite and airy picture of the manners of an age."² Lamb's imaginative "reconstruction" of the restoration milieu gave way to Hazlitt's more realistic and historical one.

The attempt to view the drama of the late seventeenth century in a socio-historical context, to see the plays, rightly or wrongly, as reflections of the "manners" of the court circle and those who tried to imitate it, gave way to moral considerations later in the nineteenth century. Thomas Babington Macaulay disparaged the "bad" morality of a restoration society that was fond of everything "ridiculous and degrading."³ The reputation of

¹Charles Lamb, "On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Age," *The Essays of Elia*, ed. Alfred Ainger (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, n.d.), p. 187.

²See William Hazlitt, "On Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar," *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* (London: Taylor and Hesse, 1819), and Leigh Hunt, *The Dramatic Works of Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh and Farquhar* (London: G. Routledge, 1866).

³Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Critical Essays*, v.2, (London: J.M. Dent, 1963), pp. 411-452.

Wycherley, and the Restoration comedy of which he was regarded a part, was adversely affected by this kind of provincialism.

For the most part, twentieth-century criticism has not viewed Restoration comedy as immoral. In fact, general critical estimates of the drama between 1660 and 1700 are quite varied. At one extreme are critics like John Palmer whose 1913 study attempted to vindicate Restoration comedy by arguing that it was an art form that should be judged according to the laws of the imagination and not those of a subjective or conventional morality.⁴ Palmer's stress on formal consideration was continued by Norman Holland who analyzed the imagery and structural elements in Wycherley.⁵ More recently Rose Zimbardo attempted to place the plays of Wycherley in the tradition of formal verse satire, explaining their themes and structures in terms of a traditional "blame/praise" format.⁶

While the general attack has not been concerned with "immorality," the drama of Wycherley and his contemporaries has suffered at the hands of modern critics. There are critics like L.C. Knights who have aggressively argued that Restoration comedy is "gross, trivial and dull"⁷

⁴John Palmer, *The Comedy of Manners* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1913).

⁵Norman N. Holland, *The First Modern Comedies: The Significance of Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959).

⁶Rose A. Zimbardo, *Wycherley's Drama: A Link in the Development of English Satire* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1965).

⁷L.C. Knights, "Restoration Comedy: The Reality and the Myth," in *Restoration Drama: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed., John Loftis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 50.

because the plays have no relation to the significant thought of late seventeenth-century England. Interestingly, it might be true that the plays of Wycherley, for instance, have no significant direct relationship to contemporary intellectual currents, but this is not sufficient grounds for deprecation. The plays of Wycherley are like all theater-- topical and public, having as their primary subject human relationships that reveal human weaknesses and strengths. The lasting impression of the drama of Wycherley and some of his contemporaries is the result of the universality of the subject matter and its strength as theater, and not its connection to the most significant intellectual thought of the day or its attempt to define a universal standard of morality. The value of the plays of Wycherley is to be found in the timelessness of their themes and subjects, and the unique treatment of those themes and subjects at the hands of William Wycherley.

How the discussion of the dramatic history of the period has affected assessments of specific Wycherley plays is evident in the commentary on his most widely read, and most appreciated, *The Country Wife*. According to Robert Hume, a respected critic and historian of the period, *The Country Wife* has provoked such drastically divergent commentary that its spread is "almost ludicrous."⁸ To some, *The Country Wife* is a farce, to others a comedy, and to still others a satire, all terms whose meanings are difficult to fix. In terms of subject matter, it is said to be a a satire on jealousy, a satire on female hypocrisy, an expose of

⁸Robert D. Hume, *The Development of Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 97.

repression in marital relationships, and an investigation into the true nature of masculinity, to name just a few. Horner, the seemingly problematic lead character, is described as both the object of Wycherley's attack and as a "positive comic hero."⁹

Like the criticism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, twentieth century criticism has suffered from limitations in approach. Earlier critics asked moral questions and found Wycherley "immoral." By stressing his satiric stance and his morality, critics of the twentieth century have attempted to rescue Wycherley, via formal considerations, as in the studies of Holland and Zimbardo. Critics now point to the follies and vice lashed in the plays and the "lessons" offered to the audience. The earlier critics wanted the plays to be moral treatises, and some twentieth century critics seem to be making them just that. While there is little reason to view the plays of Wycherley as nothing more than lewd productions for a degenerate age, there is also little reason to view the plays simply as vehicles for a moral lesson, as a theatrical expression of a value system.

The drama of the Restoration, and of William Wycherley specifically, has clearly suffered because of evaluations based on generalized and weakly supported notions about the theatre audience, its makeup, likes and dislikes; and because of evaluations based on generally accepted, though weakly supported, notions about contemporary dramatic "theory." Wycherley's reputation has also suffered at the hands of those who categorize Wycherley or other Restoration dramatists with whom he is

⁹See Chapter IV, "*The Country Wife*: New Rules for Wits," pp. 168-212.

grouped as writers of "satire," "wit," "comedy of manners," frequently without any clear or useful indication of what these terms mean.

While any interest in Wycherley's drama should have its basis in reactions to the plays themselves, extratextual approaches can be helpful, and in some instances necessary, given the passing of three centuries.¹⁰ What reevaluation requires, however, is an analysis of the historical evidence that really exists. With supporting facts, extratextual approaches are useful in narrowing the wide range of critical views. Without conclusive evidence, the assumptions we accept can perpetuate misleading critical assessments. In addition to narrowing the range of the drastically divergent critical commentary on Wycherley's plays, historical evidence might also help to elucidate some of the controversial issues that his plays raise.

Numerous studies, evaluations and comments have as their basis the assumption that "The Drama's Laws, the Drama's Patrons give." Because the audience was courtly, the plays reflect courtly concerns and practices. Because the audience was libertine and hedonistic, the plays reflect this prevailing philosophy. This movement from assumptions about the audience to assumptions about the plays raises some questions about what would constitute evidence about the nature of the Restoration theater audience, and is it available? What have critics used as "evidence"? Given what evidence is available, then what conclusion can reasonably be reached? Are

¹⁰See Guy Montgomery, "The Challenge of Restoration Comedy," in *Restoration Drama: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. John Loftis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 32-43. Montgomery believes it necessary to ground reactions to the plays in their time in order to understand the effects of the new scientific spirit.

the conclusions--these historical facts if that is what they are--useful in the interpretation of Wycherley's art? Or are they primarily of interest to theater and social historians? And what do these conclusions suggest about the validity of previous extratextual approaches to the plays?

First is the question of sources: what are the sources for information for audience reconstruction? Pepys provides firsthand accounts that are useful, and recent scholarship has turned up letters from English and foreign travelers that allude to theater audiences. But historical facts are scarce. In the absence of historical data, prologues and epilogues are often cited as evidence of an audience's makeup. Are they really useful in any attempt to reconstruct Wycherley's theater audience? And then, and possibly more important, there is the question of audience influence. Once we know who went to the theatre, we need to determine, if possible, which segment of the audience wielded the greatest influence. If evidence exists that allows us to characterize the audience as more city or more courtly, and that seems to be an issue, which segment was more influential and what form might this influence have taken? Would it be limited to certain topical jokes? And who was being invited to laugh at whom? Could the audience dictate the form and shape of drama, or only the form and shape of a topical allusion or two? Attempts to characterize the audience must also address to what extent the notion that "the drama's laws the drama's patrons give" has any basis in fact.

I

The Restoration Theater Audience

With the return of Charles the Second in 1660, England entered a new age, or more accurately an "old and new" age. To an extent it is true that the Puritan rigor of the preceding decades was supplanted by a new freedom exemplified most dramatically by the restoration of the monarchy; and by the abolition of Puritan laws forbidding theater, dance, and music. But the Puritan zeal was by no means extinguished. It was evident in the form of dissenting sermons and tracts, for example, that accounted for sixty percent of the material published in England during the years between 1660-1680. It was evident in the pulpits where ministers, when not forbidden, continued to exhort the populace to sacramentalize their toil and their lives. It was evident in the city, in "London, which had financed the Parliamentary forces, and which continued down to the Revolution to be *par excellence* 'the rebellious city,' returning four Dissenters to the Royalist Parliament of 1661, sending its mayor and alderman to accompany Lord Russell when he carried the Exclusion Bill from the Commons to the Lords, patronizing the Presbyterian ministers long after Presbyterianism was proscribed, nursing the Whig party, which stood for tolerance, and sheltering the Whig leaders against the storm which broke in 1681."¹¹

¹¹R.J. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism: A Critical Study* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1926), p. 203.

The Restoration period saw the Puritan stress on duty to God co-existing, although not peacefully, with Hobbesian cynicism, skepticism, and a new self-reliance, ideas embodied in the fustian of the heroic drama and the bawdiness of the new "comedy of manners." It was a time when medieval superstition existed along side of the new objective, empirical science.

The reign of Charles was truly an age of contradictions:

Sometimes called the beginning of the Enlightenment it prided itself upon its reasonableness, and yet, was marred by ignorance, brutality and blind hatred. It claimed culture and civilization, but it whipped prostitutes, imprisoned debtors, hanged and disemboweled criminals, and burned women at the stake. It was an age that had inherited the scientific discoveries of Copernicus, Kepler, Bacon, Galileo, Harvey, Gilbert and Toricelli, and age which produced Newton, Boyle, Hooke, and the Royal Society--and yet it trembled at the appearance of "a blazing star"... It was a liberty-loving age which gave birth to the Habeas Corpus Act, but which persecuted Catholics and Nonconformists, suppressed licensed books, and hanged priests. It was a prosperous age for merchants and landowners, yet it was plagued by slums, poverty, beggars, thieves, and highwaymen.¹²

As Wilson's description illustrates, this is a period about which we make sweeping generalizations. And both sweeping generalizations and faulty assumptions about the makeup of the Restoration theater audience fill literary histories and slant critical studies.

For many years, beginning in the eighteenth century and continuing down to the present, the Restoration theater audience, the audience between 1660-1700, or at least the influential part of it, has been

¹²John Harold Wilson, *A Preface to Restoration Drama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), pp. 2-3.

generally described as predominantly "aristocratic," "courtly," and "fashionable." Thomas Davies (1784) believed that "the King and his courtiers, in conjunction with the poets, were the pimps to debauch the morals of the people."¹³ Alexander Beljame (1881) later described the theater as "the great relaxation of the people of fashion." Recognizing that the theater-going audience was limited in number, he sanguinely states that "the city remained Puritan, horrified at the manners of the day and the audacity of the plays; the citizens did not attend the performances at all, or very rarely."¹⁴ Because only two theaters were licensed for performances, and because citizens did not attend, Beljame concludes that "theater-goers were thus reduced to the court and the tribe of officials and idlers who revolved around the King."¹⁵

¹³Thomas Davies, *Dramatic Miscellanies* (London: Thomas Davies, 1784), p. 313. Davies's comment, like those of most who discuss Restoration dramatists as a group, affects his general assessment of Wycherley's works. Instead of being viewed as the creations of a single poet, Wycherley is a poet who "faithfully transcribed the manners of the times when the king and his courtiers, in conjunction with the poets, were the pimps to debauch the morals of the people."

¹⁴Alexander Beljame, *Men of Letters and the English Public in the Eighteenth Century, 1660-1744* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co. Ltd., 1948), pp. 53-54. As do most commentators, Beljame picks up on the general notion that the audience was courtly citing "evidence" like Johnson's *Life of Dryden*: "The playhouse was abhorred by the Puritans, and avoided by those who desired the character of seriousness or decency." He also argues that the audience was courtly because he accepts the notion that the playwright must pay homage to those who were patrons and supporters of the writer's career. He accepts this notion to the extent that he believes "the author of the day became a complete and perfect sycophant" (p. 130).

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 54.

Macaulay's belief that the Restoration stage pandered to the base demands of a corrupted court society illustrates the tendency to allow an assessment of audience to affect critical judgments. The restoration of Charles, Macaulay believed, ushered in a "period of wild and desperate dissoluteness":

Even in remote manor-houses and hamlets the change was in some degree felt; but in London the outbreak of debauchery was appalling; and in London the places most deeply infected were the Palace, the quarters inhabited by the aristocracy, and the Inns of Court. It was on the support of these parts of town that the playhouse depended. The character of the drama became conformed to the character of its patrons. The comic poet was the mouthpiece of the most deeply corrupted part of a corrupted society. And in the plays . . . we find, distilled and condensed, the essential spirit of the fashionable world during the anti-Puritan reaction.¹⁶

Macaulay is not the only critic whose conception of the Restoration audience as licentious, tawdry, bored and cynical has influenced his estimate of the drama.

Beljame's audience of misfits furthered the myth of a licentious, dissolute court audience:

... the Court did everything which the Puritans had forbidden. They had worn short hair and banned every refinement of dress; the Court adopted long wigs in the Louis XIV style, and dress became one of the main preoccupations of people of fashion. They had forbidden gaming: people gambled wildly and cheated in the bargain. the Court plunged into every form of indulgence, even the most unmentionable. The Puritans had preached severity of manners: gallantry was enthroned at Court. Fashionable men called

¹⁶Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Critical Essays*, v. 2 (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1963), p. 422.

themselves 'gallants' and thought of nothing but women and how to charm them. They had set foot on a steep and dangerous slope; they soon slid to the bottom. . . The King, the 'Merry Monarch,' set the pace by openly keeping mistresses and exhibiting himself everywhere in their company.¹⁷

And Beljame's argument, and those of the others mentioned above, continues with the assertion that the only drama that could interest an audience befitting this description is one that pandered to its base desires.

In the present century critics like Leslie Hotson (1928) perpetuate the idea of a courtly audience between 1660 and 1700. Hotson, without citing specific evidence, opts for a "society" audience arguing that London nobles disliked the remaining Elizabethan theaters "with their low audiences" and were willing to pay a higher admission price in order to enjoy the elaborate embellishments and other refinements of the Restoration theater.¹⁸ Likewise, K.M.P. Burton (1958) believes that the Restoration theater "suffered from being a royal monopoly, patronized by a very limited audience....the main part of which consisted of courtiers, hangers-on and prostitutes," though she offers no specific information in support of this assertion. The respectable part of the audience was the Wits, a "well known court circle, favoured by the King, and led by Buckingham, Dorset, Rochester, Sedley, Etherege and Wycherley."¹⁹ Allardyce Nicoll's (1961 and

¹⁷Beljame, *Men of Letters*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁸Leslie Hotson, *The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), pp. 133 and 163.

¹⁹K.M.P. Burton, *Restoration Literature* (London: Hutchinson University Press, 1958), pp. 63 and 68.

1963) investigation into drama during the reign of Charles the Second led him to conclude that the "spectators. . . for whom the poets wrote and the actors played were the courtiers and their satellites. The noblemen in the pit and boxes, the fops and beaux and wits and would-be wits who hung on their society, the women of the court, depraved and licentious as the men, the courtesans with whom these women of quality moved and conversed as on equal terms, and made up at least four-fifths of the entire audience." To this gathering add "a sprinkling of footmen in the upper gallery, a stray country cousin or two scattered throughout the theater, and the picture of the audience is complete."²⁰ The theater had so much degenerated into a thing of the court that "the middle class for the most part kept away."²¹ J.H. Wilson (1965), using the same kind of general statements as support, argues that the theaters were dominated at this time by a "Court-and-Town coterie," "a closed circle of aristocrats, united against the common herd." Occasionally a "cit" would be found in the upper or middle gallery "but in general the sober middle class avoided the theaters at this time as dens of

²⁰Allardyce Nicoll, *Restoration Drama: 1600-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 8. This book is cited by A.C. Baugh *et al's A Literary History of England* as the "standard history" (p. 748) indicating the potential wide ranging affect of its ideas during the 1960's and 70's. Nicoll states that "the Restoration was from first to last an aristocratic playhouse." He continues by asserting that "of all audiences, the audience of the years 1660-1700 is perhaps the easiest to analyse." He offers little but the typical generalizations as supporting evidence, like an occasional prologue and epilogue spanning the entire forty year period.

²¹Allardyce Nicoll, *British Drama* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963), p. 137.

iniquity and vice."²² Clearly the issue by this time is court/town versus the Puritan middle class, represented by the "citizens."

The well-known debate concerning the "merits" of Restoration comedy is further evidence of the extent to which an assessment of audience has influenced discussion of the drama. L.C. Knights' well-known essay, "Restoration Comedy: The Realty and the Myth," argues that the "smart town society" that sought entertainment at the playhouses was bored and that the drama produced to entertain it was "gross, trivial and dull"; in fact, it is "insufferably dull" because it lacks "significant relation with the best thought of the time."²³ Knights' evaluation of the drama is at least informed by, if not based entirely on, his assumptions about the nature of the audience. The plays are dull because the audience was dull, interested only in sexual relationships, the behavior of the polite and those who pretended to politeness. A drama that caters to such a group, Knights concludes, can be nothing but insipid.

John Wain, a participant in the so-called Knights-Wain-Bateson controversy, also moves from a conception of the audience to an assessment of Restoration comedy. Assuming that the plays mirror the times with historical veracity and are celebrating a mode of conduct that was life to many, he concludes that Restoration theater reveals the "extent to which

²²Wilson, *A Preface to Restoration Drama*, pp. 31-2. See also Wilson's *The Court Wits* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), p. 142. Pierre Danchin, for one, argues for a more broadly based audience after 1671, the time at which the theaters began losing the upper class portion of their audiences to the Anglo-Dutch conflict.

²³L.C. Knights, "Restoration Comedy: The Reality and the Myth," p. 5.

people were unbalanced."²⁴ The comedy of the period is of an inferior kind because it was aimed at "a prepared audience who knew in advance what they wanted."²⁵ The drama, in short, is nothing but "the fever chart of a sick society."²⁶ Neither Wain nor Knights allows a seriousness for Restoration comedy because they disavow a serious theater-going public.²⁷

It is, I think, clear that the charge that the patrons of the playhouses between 1660 and 1700 were depraved and irredeemably frivolous members of a court group has made it difficult for some critics to treat Restoration comedy objectively. Assumptions about an audience lead to conclusions about plays which result in generalizations about a culture. As Harold Love correctly suggests, "the belief in the existence of a courtly audience is commonly accompanied by a conviction that the dramatists who wrote for it were somehow cut off from the most significant artistic and intellectual energies of the day: that Etherege, Wycherley, Congreve, and Dryden the playwright belonged to a coterie quite distinct from that which nourished the talents of Newton, Locke, Wren, Hooke, Shaftesbury, Purcell,

²⁴John Wain, "Restoration Comedy and Its Modern Critics," *EIC*, 6(1956), p. 367.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 370.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 367.

²⁷See F.W. Bateson, "L.C. Knights and Restoration Comedy," *EIC*, 7(1957), pp. 56-67. Bateson argues for a "serious" audience because the "effectiveness of the dramatic paradoxes depends upon the audience's continuous awareness that it is not in fairyland" (p. 56).

Halifax, Gilbert Burnet and Dryden the poet."²⁸ Many students of Restoration literature know that not to be the case.²⁹

While it has been customary to assume that Restoration theater audience was upper class, recent literary historians and commentators have opted for an audience comprising an increasing number of "cits" and members of what could be termed a growing middle class during the years 1660 to 1700. In the indispensable *The London Stage, 1660-1700*, Avery and Scouten, utilizing diaries, prologues and epilogues to the plays, were the first to dissent from the generally held belief: "The range of social classes, professions, and cultural attainments was fairly great, and the tastes of the spectators as well as their motives in attending the playhouses varied considerably."³⁰ According to Avery and Scouten, representatives of the Court mixed with "the Town" and the "middle class." Intellectuals anxious to keep abreast of literary trends attended. Fops and gallants and vizards came to mix in the pit as much as, if not more than, to see the play. The

²⁸Harold Love, "The Myth of the Restoration Audience," *KOMOS*, 1 (1967), p. 49.

²⁹In addition to the Knights-Wain-Bateson discussion of the merits of Restoration comedy, assumptions about the Restoration audience as a basis for evaluating the drama are widespread. See, for example, J.W. Krutch's *Comedy and Conscience after the Restoration* (1924) and D.W. Wilkinson's *The Comedy of Habit* (1964). Because the belief in a relatively heterogeneous audience is a more recent one, critical estimates influenced by it are not as numerous. See J.H. Smith's *The Gay Couple in Restoration Comedy*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948), and Robert Hume's, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* for discussions based on a changing audience and changing tastes.

³⁰Emmett L. Avery and Arthur Scouten, *The London Stage, 1660-1700: A Critical Introduction* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968), clxii.

court was represented by Charles and the likes of Sedley and Rochester, and gentlewomen like Lady Castlemaine and the Duchess of Newcastle. Men who had distinguished themselves in public affairs, John Evelyn, Sir Henry Bennet, Sir Richard Browne and Thomas Belasye, along with men of the government like Pepys and Penn, joined servants and family members, friends and neighbors. Additionally there were those known principally by class, members of Parliament, Templars and students. Avery's fact-filled 1966 study on the Restoration audience concludes that "the audience contained persons of all ranks and classes; of many professions, and of a wide range of interests in the drama; families attended as families, brought their older children and other members of the household, creating a basis for their presence as adult spectators in later years."³¹

Others like Harold Love, who recognizes that it is important not to overlook the significance of the court element, also believe that "to assume that the comedies of the sixties and seventies were written for a homogeneous prepared 'courtly audience' is to defy the evidence."³² In this instance, the evidence that suggests a representative audience includes the variety and changing nature of the plays, references to the plays in the tracts of Andrew Marvell, the accounts of diarists, Robert Hooke of the Royal Society, and Pepys, who make it clear that "the court only attended the theater as a body when it was in waiting on the King. At other times,

³¹Emmett L. Avery, "The Restoration Audience," *PQ*, 45(1966), p. 61. See also Harry Williams Pedicord, "The Changing Audience," *The London Theater World, 1660-1800*, ed. Robert Hume (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980), pp. 236-52.

³²Love, "The Myth of the Restoration Audience," p. 53.

[on second, fourth, and subsequent nights at revivals,] the representation of minor officials, and professional men and their families, would seem to have been more significant-- and on occasion, at least, that of the citizen and their apprentices."³³

While Love's evidence is not conclusive, his study is important because it narrows the years covered by the "Restoration" to the 1660's and 1670's, and thereby restricts data that is considered as evidence. One of the reasons for the prevalence of the notion that the "restoration audience" was courtly is the fact that the period is variously delineated, with the discussions and the evidence presented usually covering the years 1660-1720.

The commentary of a noted Restoration literary historian provides an appropriate summary: Robert Hume, after surveying some of the commentary on the Restoration audience, asserts that "what one must conclude from recent work, however fragmentary and contradictory, is simply that a courtly coterie audience is, at least, an exaggeration, and probably mostly a myth."³⁴ In the early sixties, the anti-theater sentiments of most Puritans probably kept some merchants away from a relatively clean, court dominated theater. By the end of the sixties, however, more plebeians and "cits" were attending plays that were generally smuttier than those of the earlier part of the decade. By the year 1678, another marked turning point in the audience's tastes is signaled by the advent of the morally instructive, exemplary plays of Shadwell, plays which attack the

³³*Ibid.*, p. 52.

³⁴Robert Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century*, p. 27.

moral codes of the Carolean comedies. Hume concludes that it is a bit too neat to say that when the court circle of the seventies died off its place was filled by the new bourgeois audience, wooed by exemplary comedy.

"Carolean drama," according to Hume, "is not, for the most part, by or about courtiers, and numerically speaking the bulk of its audience consists of lawyers, cits, army officers, government clerks, wives, young-men-about-the-town, whores, and rabble."³⁵ The evidence generally points, according to this camp, to a shift from an aristocratic Tory audience to a Whig bourgeois audience by 1688.

The important issue for this study is what can we know about Wycherley's audience. In order for us to conclude that for Wycherley "The Drama's Laws the Drama's Patron's give," and to argue that there is an important relationship between the theater going public and the theater, we must accurately and carefully analyze the nature of the audience between 1660, when the theaters reopened, and 1682, the year of the union of the two theater groups. It would also be imperative that we carefully distinguish between the audience and the influential segments of that audience. It is further worth emphasizing that the period of interest here is shorter by eighteen years than most discussions, which tend to describe a Restoration audience for the years 1660-1700. The problems inherent in failing to establish limits are nicely illustrated by the Harold Love-Andrew Bear debate where one is discussing a period between 1660-1680 and another

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 487.

1695-1725.³⁶ While it may be true that the theater audience before 1682 is more heterogeneous than has been described, it may also be true that the influence of the Court was felt more strongly at one time than another.

II

Wycherley's Audience

During the early 1660's, little new drama was produced while William Davenant and Thomas Killigrew solidified their hold over their respective companies. Beginning with the 1662 season, new plays were regularly appearing, some of them anti-Puritan satires. Add to interest in the newly legalized theater, the diversity of new plays, the introduction of scenery and actresses, the machines, music and dancing, and you could reasonably expect to find a diversified audience attracted to an almost completely new theater. The question is what evidence is there to support such a conclusion?

That the King and his court frequently attended the theater immediately following the licensing of the two groups is clear and not a point of contention. A plethora of evidence establishes that on the average the court witnessed some thirty-five plays in a season that offered approximately 95 plays at the theaters and at court. The presence of the King and Court, usually at the opening night's performance, continues

³⁶In addition to Harold Love's discussion in "The Myth of the Restoration Audience," see Andrew S. Bear, "Criticism and Social Change: The Case of Restoration Drama," *KOMOS*, 2 #1 (1969), pp. 23-31; and Harold Love's reply in "Bear's Case Laid Open: or, a Timely Warning to Literary Sociologists," *KOMOS*, 2 (1969), pp. 72-80.

through the rest of the 1660's and into the next decade. Giovanni Salvetti remarked on December 18, 1671, a little more than two years after Pepys's last entry, that "Their Majesties, . . . and the other Princes of the Court, went yesterday to the Theater Royal to see performed the satiric comedy newly composed by the Duke of Buckingham as a mockery of the poets, plays, and actors of the age. . . ." ³⁷ No doubt they continued to patronize the theater throughout the seventies and right up to the death of Charles in 1685. The question to be addressed later is how influential was this group?

For information concerning playgoers between 1660 and 1669, Samuel Pepys is possibly the single greatest source. While his diary is an eyewitness account, and not that of an historian, it makes clear that the theater-going public at least included representatives of all strata of society.

Of particular interest to Pepys and the fashion-conscious Mrs. Pepys were the "fine Ladies," who usually occupied a place in the boxes along with the more "respectable" members of the audience. Among them was Pepys's favorite diversion, Barbara Villiers, Lady Castlemaine and Duchess of Cleveland, Charles's favorite mistress, the mother of five of his illegitimate children. ³⁸ But, there is evidence that the pit was occupied by quite a blend of classes. This is probably attributable to the fact that, as Dryden noted, the pit was the best location from which to see and hear a

³⁷The letters of Giovanni Salvetti, a Florentine resident in London, to the secretariat in Florence contain some interesting comments on the Restoration theater. See John Orrell, "A New Witness for the Restoration Stage, 1670-1680", *Theater Research International*, 2 (1976-77), p. 89.

³⁸Pepys, 9/7/61, 4/3/65, 12/21/65, 2/4/66-7, 4/11/67, 1/15/68-9, 2/3/68-9, and elsewhere.

play. Whatever the reason, many and various people were to be found there. In addition to fops and ladies, Pepys sat near such literary figures as Sedley, Shadwell and Waller,³⁹ and Thomas Killegrew. Actresses, and we can safely assume actors, visited the theater to investigate competition and to enjoy the entertainment. Pepys, for example, reports sitting next to "pretty, witty Nell" Gwyn, and the "younger [Rebecca] Marshall"⁴⁰ at the Duke's Company's production of *Mustapha*. Other women, "who came upon the first Day of Acting. . . in Masks"⁴¹ of black velvet that entirely covered the whole face of the whore and common woman alike (Mrs. Pepys purchased a mask when they were the latest thing), rubbed shoulders with the gallants and wits and critics who crowded the pit.

The gallants went so far as to mark off their own corner, "a portion of the house nearest the stage, a hornet's nest of malice and scandal where the fair-pated beaux and snarling critics clustered and buzz and

³⁹Pepys, 3/22/64-65. While the boxes held the King and his entourage, "those men of extraordinary parts, who were the Ornaments of [the Court of Charles II] . . . the late Duke of Buckingham, my Lord Normanby, my Lord Dorset, my late Lord Rochester, Sir Charles Sidley, Dr. Frazier, Mr. Savil, Mr. Buckley" and others were most likely found in the pit. Pepys especially enjoyed sitting near Sir Charles Sedley because he found him a "very witty man, . . . [who] did at every line take notice of the dullness of the poet and the badness of the action, that most pertinently." During a production of Roger Boyle's *The General*, where by "Altemore's command Clairmont, the General, is commanded to rescue his Rivall, whom she loved, Lucidor, he, after a great deal of demurre, broke out, 'Well I'll save my Rival, and make her confess, that I deserve, while he do possesse.' 'Why, what, pox,' says Sir Ch. Sydly, 'would he have him have more, or what is there more to be had of a woman than the possessing her'".

⁴⁰Pepys, 4/3/65. Also see 3/30/67 and 1/23/66-67.

⁴¹Colley Cibber, *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber*, v.1, ed. Robert W. Lowe (New York: AMS Press Inc., 1966), p. 267.

stung."⁴² These frequenters of the pit, it appears, had little concern for the actors or those who paid to see and hear a performance. They fought, dueled, groomed their hair, picked their teeth, stood on the stage and on benches in the pit, snatched wigs off each others' heads, ogled and loved the ladies. All the while prostitutes drummed up business and Orange-Molls carried messages from beau to lady, saved patrons from choking on a piece of fruit or simply hawked their wares. Given such description it is probable that the pit influenced the drama of the day by providing plenty of examples of foolish and faddish behavior. But how representative this inattentive and indecorous group behavior was is impossible to tell. Such drastic distractions as fights and duels may have quite uncommon, but still likely to be noted by a diarists. Still the point worth making is that within the intimate confines of the small theaters the crowd was very active, so much so that the dynamics between the actor and audience was an influential variable in the production of Restoration comedy.⁴³

⁴²Montague Summers, *The Restoration Theater* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1934), p. 79. In order to understand what to the modern theater-goer constitutes shameless, insolent behavior it is important to remember that as many as went to see the play went to be seen. As Pepys's diary, the prologues, the plays and the epilogues of the period make clear, the Restoration audience was extremely interested in itself. If a play proved unentertaining the audience would entertain itself, usually by expressing its disapproval. In March of 1660, almost as if he was afraid of being caught without one, Pepys went to "Pope's Head Alley and called on Adam Chard, and bought a catcall there." This tube-shaped instrument designed to mimic the sound of a mewling cat was obviously used to express a patron's disapproval. Pepys reports that the eunuch in Davenant's *The Siege of Rhodes* was "hissed off the stage." The audience was not willing, it seems, to let bad acting pass with impunity.

⁴³See J.L. Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 8-16. Styan believes, correctly I think, that the audience accepted "its own participatory role in the business of playmaking" (p. 11).

In addition to the court and its hangers-on, there is evidence that the men of "the Town" who had distinguished themselves in public affairs were ably represented.⁴⁴ This frequently overlooked group included such luminaries as Thomas Belasye(1627-1700), Viscount of Fauconberg, member of Charles's Privy Council, captain of the guard and ambassador to Italy; Sir Henry Bennet (1618-1685), Earl of Arlington and member of the King's "Cabal" ministry whose "readiness to serve and encourage Charles in his dissolute habits, secured his position,"⁴⁵ and Sir Richard Browne(1605-1683), diplomat and clerk of the King's Council until 1671, who headed the triumphal procession of Charles to London. John Evelyn(1620-1706), well known diarist, virtuoso, fellow of the Royal Society and hearty Royalist who was quickly disgusted by the profligacy of the court, attended the theater even though he never enthusiastically endorsed it. Even religious men, like Thomas Sprat(1635-1713), Bishop of Rochester, later Dean of Westminster and supporter of high church doctrines; Gilbert Sheldon(1598-1677), Archbishop of Canterbury; and William Howard(1614-1680), Knight of the Bath, Viscount Stafford, an eminent Catholic; all of these men patronized a theater that only two decades hence would be reviled by another religious man as immoral. Contemporary accounts have other Royal Society members and prominent men in London, such as Christopher Wren,

⁴⁴See Avery's "The Restoration Audience," pp. 54-61, and Love, "The Myth of the Restoration Audience," pp. 49-56.

⁴⁵Pepys, 2/17/63, and 11/6/63. Arlington and others unsuccessfully attempted to procure Francis Stuart for the King's bed.

Dr. James Pierce, and Timothy Clarke, John Hoskins and Abraham Hill, also in attendance.⁴⁶

Occasionally Pepys's business associates accompanied him to the theater. Among them were Edward P. Montague (1625-1672), the first Earl of Sandwich and joint general of the fleet with General Monck. William Viscount Brouncker (1620?-1684), the first president of the Royal Society and commissioner of the navy, often joined Pepys for a meal and a play. John Berkley, (d1678) another commissioner of the navy, and his wife; admirals Sir John Mennes (1599-1671), and Sir George Asycue (1646-1671), along with Captain John Creed were all occasional play-goers. As already mentioned, Elizabeth Pepys and her servants, Deb Willet, Betty Mitchell and Mary Mercer; Tom Pepys, Samuel's brother; cousins Betty and Barbara; his father John; friends like the Mountagues and Penns; neighbors like the merchant John Andrews and his family, and Will Batelier all attended, making a day at the theater a family or neighborhood outing for some. Even Pepys's clerk, Will Hewer, found time and money enough to buy a place for family members, friends, neighbors and servants who enjoyed the drama that the Restoration had provided for their amusement.

The facts paint a picture of an audience between 1660 and 1665 not completely or predominantly a thing of the court. The patrons were not all fops or beaux, whores or critics. While it is true that most of them were educated professionals, with the exception of an apparently small number of wives, children and servants, they do represent quite a cross section of

⁴⁶Pepys, 10/2/62, 1/5/62-63, 12/8/66, 12/27/66, 1/15/66-67, 8/15/67, 8/20/67, and 9/19/68.

society. Because the diaries of Pepys include many references to theater attendance with associates from the Naval Office, Avery feels that if we had "another Pepys in the inner circles of the army, the law, the clergy or the medical profession, we might hope to find an equally large group of professional men who formed a substantial part of the audience."⁴⁷ While this is a reasonable inference, there is no evidence to establish it as a conclusion.

The picture of the Restoration audience is not complete with the addition of professional men and their families and servants to the already established Court and town components. There is another segment of this society that must be added to the putative picture of the audience between 1660 and 1665. That group is the citizens of London, its merchants and shopkeepers, all members of "the middle class." Pepys makes it clear from the outset of his record that those members of society with mercantile interests and less-than-professional status were also in attendance during the first half of the 1660's. On a visit to the theater in 1661, he was troubled to be seen "by four of our office clerks, which sat in the half crown boxes and I in the 1s. 6d."⁴⁸ The status conscious Mr. Pepys was embarrassed. Two days after Christmas in 1662, he and his wife went "to the Duke's Theater, and saw the second part of *Rhodes*, . . . Home with great content with my wife, not so well pleased with the company at the house to-day, which was full of citizens, there hardly being a gentleman or woman in the house." A

⁴⁷Avery, "The Restoration Audience," p. 58.

⁴⁸Pepys, 1/19/60-61.

small group of "pretty ladies" near the Pepyses "made sport in it, being jostled and crowded by 'prentices."⁴⁹ And only a week after Christmas in 1663, Pepys and his guest went to the Duke's House to see *The Villain*, where they "found the house was full of citizens, and so the less pleasant."⁵⁰

While this is not a complete record of the theater audience during the years 1660-1665, it is enough to sketch the outlines of the crowd. We can confidently hypothesize that the new theater innovations and a variegated drama was probably starting to attract a new and varied clientele. The presence of the King and court attracted a few of the curious, especially on opening nights.⁵¹ The Christmas, Easter and Whitsuntide holidays made it easier for men of business to attend,⁵² though it might be a mistake to conclude that the citizen did not attend at other

⁴⁹Pepys, 12/27/62.

⁵⁰Pepys, 1/1/62-63.

⁵¹Pepys, 3/360-61, 8/15/67, 8/17/67, 2/6/67, 2/6/67-68, 3/26/68, 9/28/68, 2/25/68-69, and 2/26/68-69.

⁵²Pepys, 12/27/62, 1/1/62-63, 1/1/67-68 and 12/26/68. The entry for January 1, 1662-63, begins with an expression of his pleasure at being recognized at the Exchange that day by a few unnamed courtiers. Later in that same entry he expresses displeasure at the number of "cits" in the theater. This is probably no more than an upwardly mobile, Pepys expressing displeasure not so much at their presence, but at the absence of the court and fine ladies whose presence he so much enjoyed. On numerous occasions Pepys remarked that all the pleasure of the theater was the presence of the King and his mistress. For the Pepyses, the Restoration theater was a great leveller. When it was crowded with royalty he felt regal; when the theater was crowded with citizens, he felt plebian. Moreover, Pepys like many royalists had a patronizing attitude toward Cromwellians and men who supported the commonwealth, and often to be a citizen was to be anti-crown.

times. The fact that Pepys does not mention the "citizens" more than a few times in nine years should come as no surprise. As a personal record, his diary is a view of the world filtered through his eyes. It is the written testimony of one man who was clearly taken in by the presence of royalty, and as such, we can reasonably conclude that he did not look at the audience, or his times for that matter, with the disinterested eyes of an historian. All in all, though the information available points to a small and varied audience during the period 1660-1665; the proportion of "cits," to Town folk, to court coterie, however, is impossible to determine.

During the next few years, the renewed theatrical activity was slowed by the plague, which closed the theaters in June of 1665, and by the great fire which kept them shuttered until October of 1666. The forms of the drama popular in the preceding five year period continued to enjoy popular support when the theaters reopened, but there was also a "definite move [in the later sixties] toward the smut and profanity often considered typical of Carolean drama."⁵³ Nevertheless, the drama remained varied. During this period what Hume calls "comic accretions have killed Spanish romance as a special form. Moral tone in general is sagging, and comedy has been affected by a heavy dose of French-originated farce. The gay

⁵³Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century*, p. 249. Heroic plays continued but their number was limited to four between 1666-69: *The English Princess, or The Death of Richard III*(1667), *The Black Prince*(1667), *Tryphon*(1668), and *Tyrannick Love*(1669). Other forms of the drama at this time included tragicomedy, Spanish intrigue comedy, and London low comedy, like *The Sullen Lovers*(1668) and *She would if she could*(1668).

couple, witty-conversational comedy made a clear cut appearance by 1667, but it was almost buried in the flood of farce at the end of the decade."⁵⁴

The audience for these plays continued to be diversified and small, so small in fact that both theaters found it difficult to fill their houses (combined seating capacity was approximately 800) on the same night. The life-disrupting effects of the fire and the plague that crippled London and environs during the 1665-66 season were probably reasons for the smaller crowds. Thomas Killegrew, the manager and patentee of the King's Company, told Pepys "how the Audience at his House is not above half so much as it used to be before the late fire."⁵⁵ Six months later, however, Pepys found the number of patrons for Dryden's *Sir Martin Mar-all* enough to fill the house.⁵⁶

The general marketing to the public at large-- actresses and presumably actors soliciting friends and acquaintances, mass distribution of play bills, etc., suggests the notion that someone felt that anyone with enough money to buy a ticket was a potential member of the audience.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p. 268.

⁵⁵Pepys, 2/12/66-67.

⁵⁶Pepys, 8/16/67. Pepys, 2/6/67-68. See also 10/19/67---"to see *The Black Prince*--thereby two, but no seats in pit--into upper gallery for first time. A very large crowd came to see the opening night performance of George Etherege's *She would if she could*. Even though Pepys was there by two o'clock, he found "there [were] 1000 people put back that could not have room in the pit: and [he] at last, because [his] wife was there, made shift to get into the 18d. box, and there saw; but, Lord! how full was the house." Of those who successfully acquired a place in the pit were the Duke of Buckingham, Sedley, Etherege, Mrs. Pepys, Betty Turner, and two of Mrs. Pepys's servants, Deb Willet and Mary Mercer.

These early direct marketing techniques suggest the extent to which this was viewed as public entertainment. While multiple benefits, like the yearly one for the actresses, were likely to draw full houses during the period after the fire, occasionally advance people were needed to insure a good crowd. For *The City Match* (1688), Elizabeth Knepp, a King's Company actress, sent her maid out to do the soliciting. She went to Pepys's house "to tell [him] that the woman's day at the playhouse is today, and that therefore [he] must be there to increase the profit."⁵⁷ That afternoon the King and Court helped make the house "mighty full" "for the woman's sake." When there was a premiere performance or a benefit at one of the two houses it apparently drew its capacity crowd at the expense of its rival. So Pepys reports going "to the King's playhouse . . . and there saw *The Faithfull Shepherdess*. But, Lord! what an empty house, there not being; as I could tell the people, so many as to make up above 10 [pounds] in the whole house. The being of a new play at the other House, I suppose, being the cause."⁵⁸

By 1667, the King and the court are still attending, especially on opening nights.⁵⁹ The wits, like Rochester, Sedley, Buckingham, and

⁵⁷Pepys, 9/28/68.

⁵⁸Pepys, 2/26/68-69. See 8/15/67 for the effect of a full house on a rival theater. See the following for an account of full houses on the opening nights of new plays: 4/15/67, 8/17/67, 10/19/67, 3/26/68, 7/31/68 and 2/25/69-69. The playhouses apparently needed to take in approximately 250 to cover expenses. See Judith Milhouse, "Company Management," *The London Theater World, 1660-1800*, ed. Robert Hume (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980), p. 19.

⁵⁹For Royal patronage on opening night see Pepys, 3/27/67, Dryden's *The Maiden Queen*; 4/15/67, Ned Howard's *The Change of Crownes*; 8/15/67, not named; 8/17/67, Queen Elizabeth's Troubles and the History of Eight-Eight; 12/19/67, Orrery's *The Black Prince*; 3/26/68, Davenant's *The Man is*

theater employees like Killegrew, still visited the pit. Playwrights like Etherege and Shadwell, interested in what was succeeding on the stage, and actresses such as Betty Hall and Elizabeth Knepp, for instance, joined the ubiquitous whores and ladies, businessman and friends of Pepys⁶⁰ at the best popular entertainment of the day. That the "rest of the audience" included a growing number of citizens and merchants during this time is also verified by Pepys. On January 1, 1667-68, again at Dryden's *Sir Martin Mar-all*, Pepys sees "here a mighty company of citizens, 'prentices, and others; and it makes me observe that when I began first to be able to bestow a play on myself; I do not remember that I saw so many by half of the ordinary 'prentices and mean people in the pit at 2s-6d. apiece as now; I going several years no higher than the 12d. and then the 18d. places, though I strained hard to go in then when I did - so much the vanity and prodigality of the age is to be observed in this perticular."⁶¹ When Pepys wished to reflect soberly on the prodigality of his age he stumbled upon a holiday crowd of citizens at the theater and used them as the point of departure for his moralizing, just as he used a holiday crowd years earlier to express a professional man's prejudice against the working sort. While Pepys helps establish the "citizen" as a part of the early Restoration

the Master; 7/31/68, Lacy's *Monsieur Ragou*; 2/25/68-69, Shadwell's *The Royal Shepherdess*.

⁶⁰Pepys, 2/4/66-67, 2/18/66-67, 2/6/67-68, 7/22/67, 9/19/68, 12/8/66, 12/27/66, 1/15/66-67, 2/5/66-67, 8/1/67, 8/13/67, 8/20/67, 8/22/67, 10/16/67, 2/20/67-68, 3/26/68, 9/19/68, 12/30/68, and 4/16/69.

⁶¹Pepys, 1/1/67-68.

audience, it is not safe to conclude from this information alone that the number of "mean people" had increased significantly over the life of the diary.

Other evidence that is available does, however, suggest that regardless of increased prices, citizens and "mean folk" were a growing segment of the audience during the late 1660's.⁶² The assumption that the citizens were present in larger numbers, and therefore more noticeable as a distinct element of the audience close to the holiday season, is supported by Pepys's entry for December 26, 1668. On that day, Pepys attended the Duke's company production of Fletcher's *Women Pleased* (1647), and found "the house full of ordinary citizens."⁶³ A few days later Pepys was accompanied to the theater by a merchant and neighbor, John Andrews, and his family. Apparently, like all prejudice, Pepys's was not strong enough to preclude a merchant from being numbered among his friends.

The four year period starting with the 1666 season featured a wide variety of plays catering to an audience seemingly varied, and clearly small. As was true in the earlier part of the decade, the audiences contained representatives from all strata of society. The ever increasing prices seemed to have had little effect on the make-up of the audience. The lack of leisure time, probably decreasing as England moved into the modern age during the late seventeenth century, seems a more pertinent issue. Ordinary working people, in attendance in larger numbers during or close to

⁶²See Leo Hughes, *The Drama's Patrons: A Study of the Eighteenth Century London Audience* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), p. 170.

⁶³Pepys, 12/26/68.

holidays, might have been too busy meeting their daily work responsibilities to frequent the theater in mass at any other time.

Something of a turning point for late seventeenth century drama occurs with the 1670-71 season when the fortunes of existing modes and the two licensed theater groups were altered. Serious drama, with Dryden as the notable contributor, was on the decline. What had previously been popular on the comic stage, mostly farcical comedy, was giving way to both heroic comedy (Dryden), a reaction against "low comedy" influenced by heroic drama, and to a new, more realistic and natural presentation in the satiric city comedy of Wycherley and Shadwell. As the popularity of the rhymed heroic play waned, sex and spectacle began to flourish. The Duke's company, now ably co-managed by the experienced actors Thomas Betterton and Henry Harris, prospered during the years 1671-73 largely because the King's company failed to mount sufficient competition. While the Duke's company was opening its new Dorset Gardens Theater in November of 1671, the King's company, which lost the Bridges Street theater to a fire in January of 1672, was suffering through a very poor season at Lincoln's Inn Fields where it would stay until the completion of the new Drury Lane in March of 1674.

Given these trends, it is no surprise that the popular plays of the 1670-74 period are then slightly different in kind from those popular in the sixties. By 1674, representative plays like Settle's *The Empress of Morocco*(1673) and Dryden's *Amboyna*(1672) included spectacle and horror; music, which was always popular, took on new importance in plays like Perrin's *Ariadne*(1674), Shadwell's *The Tempest*(1674) and Newcastle's *The*

Triumphant Widow(1674); and while French farce was on the wane after 1672, the sexual comedy of Wycherley and others enjoyed some popularity.⁶⁴

The available evidence suggests that the audience for these plays, though newer hybrid forms, is generally made up of the same elements that patronized the theater earlier. Without Pepys, all the evidence is in the form of prologues and epilogues, and remarks in the plays themselves. While supporting the notion of an audience of court, town and city elements, it also suggests changes in the relative proportions of the various segments of the audience.⁶⁵ The prologues to John Crowne's *The History of Charles the Eighth of France*(1671), Dryden's *Marriage A la Mode* and Wycherley's *The Gentleman Dancing Master* suggest that because the "Court," one of the audience's consistently large and stable elements, is now preoccupied with the Third Anglo-Dutch War, the players will now have to rely on the citizens of London to fill the places left vacant. Crowne's prologue points to this shift by noting that because the "Gallants All to sea are gone,"

... our dull Author swears he but aspires
To please the city wives and country squires;
And all the sober audience of the Town
Those of the long robe and the talking gown
With serious men of Trade . . .⁶⁶

⁶⁴See Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century*, pp. 280-99.

⁶⁵See Pierre Danchin, "*Les Public des Theaters Londoniens a L'epoque de la Restauration D'apres Les Prologues et Les Epilogues*," pp. 847-88.

⁶⁶John Crowne, "Prologue to *The History of Charles the Eighth of France*," *The Dramatic Works of John Crowne*, v. 1, ed. James Maidment and W.H. Logan (London: H. Sotherton and Co., 1873), p. 130.

The absence of the gallants is so pronounced that the prostitutes have had to adjust their methods and places of solicitation:

Lord, how reform'd and quiet we are grown,
 Since all our Boxes and all our Wits are gone:
 Fop-Corner now is free from Civil War;
 White-Wig and Vizard make no longer jar. . . .
 Poor pensive Punk now peeps ere Plays begin,
 Sees the bare Bench, and dares not venture in: ⁶⁷

The fire that destroyed the Theater Royal in 1672 forced the players to move to the old Lincoln's Inn Fields, which was a considerable distance from the mercantile city. Dryden notes the problem they will have in attracting the apparently more important citizen audience:

Our City Friends so far will hardly come,
 They can take up with Pleasures nearer home;
 And see gay Shows; and gawdy Scenes elsewhere:
 For we presume they seldom come to hear. ⁶⁸

The Dorset Garden Theater, recently built for the Duke's troupe, was elaborately equipped for spectacle, in which the theater-goer had become more interested. Dryden and the King's company, in their attempts to be competitive at a time when the potential audience is shrinking, pledged in a bantering way to try "T' oblige the Town, the City and the Court,"⁶⁹ the

⁶⁷ John Dryden, "Prologue to *Marriage A la Mode*," *The Works of John Dryden*, v. 11, eds. John Loftis and David S. Rhodes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 225-26.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

three distinct groups which made up the largest portion of the audience. They needed "cits" to fill those bare benches and they succeeded at least on one occasion. Giovanni Salvetti attended the King's company production of *The Rehearsal* and reported on December 8, 1671 that the "play rightly earns the general applause as much from the Court as from the City."⁷⁰

Wycherley's comments made in his prologues, plays and epilogues during the autumn of 1671 and December of 1672, suggest that he was cognizant of the prominence of the continually growing citizen element. Lady Flippant, "in distress for a Husband though still disclaiming against marriage," asks her brother, the covetous, lecherous commonwealth man, Alderman Gripe, to set her down near the Lincoln's Inn Field's playhouse. Gripe, the Puritan, replies with feigned indignation, "The Playhouse, do you think I will be seen near the Playhouse?"⁷¹ His sister patronized the theater as he undoubtedly would if his attendance could go unnoticed.

The prologue to *The Gentleman Dancing Master*, a play involving the attempt of a rich merchant to secure a desirable match for his daughter, is a mocking encomium addressed to "the City." The Duke's company's move to Dorset Gardens brought them closer to the mercantile because,

Our Author. . . 'finding 'twould scarce do,
At, t'other end o'th' Town, is come to you:⁷²

⁷⁰Orrel, "A New Witness for the Restoration Stage, 1670-1680," p. 89.

⁷¹William Wycherley, "Love in a Wood," *The Plays of William Wycherley*, ed. Arthur Friedman (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 81. (IV, i, 154-55).

⁷²Wycherley, "Prologue," *The Gentleman Dancing Master*, 1-2.

While Puritans and merchants in general found the theater anathema, and the anti-puritan, anti-citizen satire particularly loathsome, it is likely that many Puritans did not. Satire alone would not keep them away, just as the ridicule heaped upon gallants and wits and ladies did not keep them away. Then, as now, satire was "a sort of Glass, wherein beholders do generally discover everybody's face but their own."⁷³ Wycherley mockingly suggests that rather than be "branded for a wit/He with you able men [of the city] would credit get." He knew who his audience was, and the epilogue suggests that rather than avoid the theater the citizens were purchasing admission tickets:

You good men o'th' Exchange, on whom alone
We must depend, when Sparks to Sea are gone
Into the Pit already you are come, . . .
And since all Gentlemen must pack to Sea,
Our Gallants, and our Judges you must be;
We therefore, and our Poet, do submit
To all the Chamlet Cloaks now i' the Pit.⁷⁴

Based on these references, it appears that the merchants and citizens, by this time, are an influential and sizeable part of the theater crowd. The question remains, however. How much faith can we put in the prologues

⁷³Jonathan Swift, "The Preface of the Author," *Full and True Account of the Battle fought last Friday between the Ancient and the Modern Books in St. James's Library*," in *Gulliver's Travels and other Writings*, ed. Louis A. Landa (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), p. 358.

⁷⁴ *GDM*, Prologue, ll. 25-26.

and epilogues as evidence? While they help sketch outlines they do not constitute conclusive evidence.

In an attempt to characterize an audience it is tempting to identify an audience's tastes and to suggest that these tastes dictate a play's content. At this point there is no empirical data to prove that this conclusion is a reasonable one. It would also be just as reasonable to assume the converse, that the new subject matter in the theater attracted a different kind of crowd and that the change in plays preceded, and possibly caused, a change in the makeup of the audience. In addition to the use of prologues and epilogues, other "evidence" is cited in the attempt to show the composition and disposition of the audience during this period.

One such example of this approach is the use of the changing practice of Shadwell between 1668 and 1672 to illustrate the changing nature of the Restoration audience. The "Preface" to *The Sullen Lovers* (1668), for example, attacks the play's hero as a "swearing, whoring Ruffian," while castigating the witty heroine as an "impudent ill-bred tomrig."⁷⁵ While this play does have a few witty love passages reminiscent of some contemporary wit comedy, the hero and heroine do not converse wittily, nor do they disparage generally accepted values. Shadwell's second major comedy, *The Humorist* (1670) is also a clear denunciation of the love-game and the intrigue modes. Even though *The Humorist* was not well received, Shadwell continued with the anomalous comedy, *The Miser* (1672), a decidedly moral play that was again rather indifferently received. Some

⁷⁵Thomas Shadwell, "Preface to *The Sullen Lovers*," *The Complete Works of Thomas Shadwell*, v. 1, ed. Montague Summers (London: The Fortune Press, 1927), p. 11.

suggest that in response to the shifting audience and its tastes, Shadwell gave up the exemplary mode for the more realistic and satiric gay couple mode in the fashion of Betterton's *The Amorous Widow*(1670). While his plays are not as decidedly moral hereafter, Shadwell did not completely abandon his predilection for the moral.

By 1674, prologues, epilogues and the other scanty references suggest that the relative proportions of the city, town, and Court audience may have been changing. More references to "citizens" have caused some to conclude that there was a diminishing court and town interest and a burgeoning city interest. But what the references fail to tell us is if the audience maintained a constant number of the court and increasing number of cits, or if the courtly crowd fell off and the number cits remained fixed, or if both grew, one at a faster pace than another. And which, if either, was more influential.

What we do know is that the King's Company continued to be plagued by the after-effects of the fire at their former theater, financial problems aggravated by disputes between the actors, and an inability to mount quality productions. The Duke's company, meanwhile, was succeeding with gay couple comedies and operas embellished with the aid of their great machinery. The Duke's players' emphasis on spectacle and mediocrity spelled doom for the King's Company. As Cibber reports "so wanton a Change of the Publick Taste, therefore, began to fall as heavy upon the King's Company as their greater Excellence in Action had before

fallen upon their competitors: of which Encroachment upon wit several good Prologues in those Days frequently complain'd of."⁷⁶

Dryden's "Prologue on the Opening of the House"(1674) is one such prologue. After apologizing for the "plain built" and "homely" new theater, he claims that it is good enough considering,

T'were Folly now a stately Pile to raise,
To build a Play-House while you throw down Plays,
Whilst Scenes, Machines, and empty Operas reign,
And for the Pencil You the Pen disdain.
While Troops of famisht Frenchmen hither drive,
And laugh at those upon whose Alms they live:
Old English Author's vanish, and give place
To these new Conqu'rors of the Norman Race.⁷⁷

According to one opinion, the superiority of the Duke's company and a theater dependent "much more upon the Ignorant than the sensible Auditor"⁷⁸ were pushing the King's company down and holding it under.

The years 1675 through 1677 were fruitful ones for Restoration drama. The above noted trends, seemingly unpropitious, influenced over a short period of time some of the period's more memorable plays. From the vain "shows and scenes," "machines and Tempests,"⁷⁹ that Dryden decried, Restoration comedy passes to its full glory with Dryden, Shadwell,

⁷⁶ Cibber, *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber*, v. 1, p. 94.

⁷⁷ John Dryden, "Prologue on the Opening of the New House," *The Works of John Dryden*, v. 1, ed. Vinton A. Dearing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956), pp. 49-50.

⁷⁸ *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber*, v. 1, p. 95.

⁷⁹ Dryden, "Prologue on the Opening of the New House," pp. 149-50.

Wycherley, Behn and Crowne at their peaks, a new theater in operation, and twice as many new productions in 1676 as in 1673.⁸⁰

Between the years 1677 and 1682, there was a depression in the theater, mostly attributable to the effects of the 1678 Popish Plot and the ensuing Exclusion Crisis that slowed the offering of new plays. "In the 1676-77 and 1677-78 season we find eighteen new plays each year; and for 1678-79 we find only six."⁸¹ The King's Company was once again suffering, producing only two new plays and losing Dryden and Lee to the Duke's Company. This new direction in drama during the spring of 1678 was either caused by or followed by a shift in the audience's tastes.

First, the audiences were getting smaller and smaller as the two houses, especially the King's, floundered.⁸² By the late seventies the influence of "the ladies" is beginning to be felt.⁸³ Seemingly, or arguably, upset by the sex themes of the mid-seventies, the "ladies" helped initiate a move away from cuckolding and toward constancy in drama. Displeased that the plays emphasized female hypocrisy in the wife-and-gallant-versus husband plots, and female weakness in the wife-succumbs-to-gallant plots,

⁸⁰Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century*, p. 300.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, pp. 318-19.

⁸²See Cibber, v. 1, p. 96 and George Whiting, "The Condition of the London Theaters, 1679-1683: A Reflection of the Political Situation," *MP*, 25(1927), pp. 195-206.

⁸³John Harrington Smith, "Shadwell, the Ladies, and the Change in Comedy," *MP*, 46 (1948), pp. 22-23.

they supposedly rebelled. Aphra Behn's "Preface" to *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678) intimates that her play was the target of a "ladies" boycott.⁸⁴ Behn defends her plays by saying that she gave the ladies what they demanded. By the middle and late eighties, however, the ladies notch their victory by strongly indicating a preference for comedy like Crowne's chaste *Sir Courtly Nice* (1685), and Shadwell's didactic reform comedy, *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688).

Generally, though, the period of 1679-82 seems to be one of indifference to the theater. Shadwell's prologue to *The Woman Captain* (1679) points to the desperate straits of the theater as the growing elements of the audience, the middle class, no longer found entertainment or escape in plays fueled by a real political crisis:

The Citt who with his Wife and hopeful Son
... now all does shun⁸⁵

By 1681, Crowne could report that "Play-houses like foresaken barns are grown."⁸⁶ Those who maintained an interest in the theater were interested in using it, not being entertained by it. Immediately after the Popish Plot, politically motivated groups were vying with one another to get their Whig

⁸⁴Aphra Behn, "To the Reader," *The Works of Aphra Behn*, v.4, ed. Montague Summers (New York: Phaeton Press, 1967), p. 7.

⁸⁵Thomas Shadwell, "Prologue to *The Woman Captain*," *The Complete Works of Thomas Shadwell*, v. 4, ed. Montague Summers (London: Fortune Press, 1927), p. 15.

⁸⁶John Crowne, "Prologue" to Henry the Sixth, quoted in "The Condition of the London Theaters, 1679-1683," p. 198.

or Tory plays before an audience.⁸⁷ A theater given over to polemics failed to draw large crowds. Dryden spoke of an audience now composed "generally [of] persons of honour, nobelman, and ladies, or, at the worst, as one of your authors calls his gallants, men of wit and pleasure about the town."⁸⁸ Gone are the citizens and merchants who had been a growing part of the audience from 1671-77, and with them the drama of variety, spectacle and sex that probably appealed, as at least one critic has suggested, to the "playboy" in them.⁸⁹

Attempting to breathe new life into the theaters, the managers tried to attract the politically interested with political plays. The result was predictably the banning of anti-royalist plays and rigid censorship during 1680-81. The real political crisis, a theater that tried to capitalize on it, financial troubles that originated in the late seventies and which were now being aggravated by recalcitrant actors, all of these in combination justified the prudent merger of the two companies in 1682:

. . . . Mohun and Hart now growing old, . . . and the Younger Actors, as Goodman and Clark, and others, being impatient to get into their Parts; and growing intractable, the Audiences too of both houses then

⁸⁷See Whiting, "The Condition of the London Theaters, 1679-1683,"

⁸⁸John Dryden, "Vindication of the Duke of Guise," quoted in *The Drama's Patron*, p. 93.

⁸⁹Gerald Weales, "Introduction," *The Complete Plays of William Wycherley*, ed. Gerald Weales (New York: W.W. Norton and Company Inc, 1966), xii.

falling off, the Patentees of each. . . united their
interests and both Companies into one. . .⁹⁰

The answer, then, to the question earlier posed is that we cannot with any specificity define the theater-going audience during the years 1660-1682. We can however draw a general outline. The available evidence suggests that throughout the entire period in question most strata of society were represented in the theaters. It also suggests that the citizen, the businessman, attended the theater in increasing numbers as Wycherley was gaining prominence in the early to mid-seventies. The notion that the dramatists of the years 1660-1682 wrote for a licentious, dissolute court audience that liked to see itself represented on the stage is as untenable as the myth that the Restoration theater audience was exclusively aristocratic and courtly.

III

Audience Influence

Related to the question of audience composition is that of the audience's influence. Undoubtedly King Charles II had an influence on the theaters during the early sixties. Clearly the King's patronage of the theater and physical presence in the playhouses greatly assisted the rebirth of a theater all but dead for eighteen years. It is even probably not too much of an exaggeration to insist that Charles as a habitual playgoer and

⁹⁰ *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber*, v. 1, p. 96.

patron was very influential.⁹¹ That is not to say, however, that his influence was pervasive or dominant. Like many of his contemporaries, Charles was a dilettante, interested in disparate things. While he encouraged playwrights and the theatrical companies, he also encouraged the new science and the Royal Society, building and garden planning, and park and town planning. It was probably true that Charles was said by others to be more influential than he really was. To exaggerate his influence would do an injustice to the decided influence of the theater's patrons during the reign of Charles and to the creative expression of a new breed of dramatist. To downplay his influence would also be a mistake.

James Sutherland convincingly argues that the influence of the King on the establishment of the rhymed heroic play appears to have been decisive. But while Charles's friendship and suggestions constituted encouragement, encouragement did not constitute patronage. For courtiers and wits, encouragement, recognition and approbation were probably sufficient compensation for writing. For professional men of letters like Dryden, remuneration and patronage would have been more welcome. Unfortunately for some like Wycherley, Charles was prepared to offer more words than pounds. His fondness for Wycherley, for instance, never translated into money.⁹² John Dryden, who had defended and celebrated

⁹¹The view of a heavily influential Court throughout the period 1660-1700 is advanced by Dobree, *Restoration Comedy*; Loftis, *Revels History*; Nicoll, *Restoration Drama, 1660-1700*; J.H. Wilson, *A Preface to Restoration Comedy* and *The Court Wits*; Beljame, *Men of Letters*; and others.

⁹²Given a salary of L 200 a year, increased to L 300 by 1677, Dryden did not receive the L 1075 he was owed at the time of the King's death. Samuel Wesley's lines record that Charles' treatment of Butler:

the King in his writings for twenty-five years, and who was Charles's Laureate, fared a little better, but still not as agreed. Samuel Butler, whose *Hudibras* was so well loved by the King that he carried a copy of it with him for a time, received nothing but Charles's gratitude.

Clearly the argument that "from the moment a man adopted the career of a writer he was obliged to swear allegiance to fashionable society and make himself a courtier or die of hunger"⁹³ is specious. Some swore allegiance to fashionable society and were still left without material reward. And many of those who won favor were rewarded only with promises of gratitude.

The extent of Charles II's interest in the theater is outlined by Cibber's statement that the differences between the two companies were so much the "Delight and Concern of the Court, that they were not only supported by its being frequently present at their publick Presentations, but its taking cognizance even of their private Government; insomuch that their particular Differences, Pretensions or complaints ended by the King or Duke's Personal Command or Decision."⁹⁴ The King did assist in the rebuilding of the Theater Royal by adding a pledge of L 2000 to the pledge

"When Butler, needy wretch, was yet alive/No generous patron would a dinner give/see him when starv'd to death and turn'd to dust,/Presented with a monumental bust./The poet's fate is here an emblem shown;/He ask'd for bread and received a Stone."

⁹³Beljame, *Men of Letters*, p. 130.

⁹⁴Cibber, *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber*, v. 1, p. 89.

of the Duchess of Cleveland,⁹⁵ an unusual situation. He also presented royal garments to the theaters to be used as costumes by the players. Given his obvious interest in the theater, the theatrical world was probably equally interested in him, though not inclined to write to suit his personal tastes even if known.

Taste in theater, some argue, was governed by the Court wits.⁹⁶ To please the King and the wits, the argument goes, was to be assured of a successful play. Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer* reportedly succeeded because the wits' approval paved the way for the town's approbation. This argument would have the wits as arbiters of taste though there is little reason to believe that they were. Sedley on occasion would entertain the pit with impromptu analysis, and Buckingham's *Rehearsal* poked fun at the heroic play but did nothing to stop the vogue. These men were writers who toyed with the drama; they wrote for prestige and to demonstrate their wit, and not for money. Occasionally their productions proved successful and therefore influential, but no more influential than any successful play is during a time when anything that works is quickly imitated. Like the King, the wits were praised and thanked by the well-known dramatists of the day for suggesting plots and "correcting" plays, but this praise is probably as much flattery as fact. The Earl of Norwich provided Settle with the subject of *The Empress of Morocco*, Sedley corrected Shadwell's *A True Widow*, the

⁹⁵Orrell, "A New Witness for the Restoration Stage, 1670-1680," pp. 90-1.

⁹⁶See K.M.P. Burton, *Restoration Literature*, p. 61, and J.H. Wilson's *The Court Wits*, pp. 144-47.

Earl of Mulgrave corrected Dryden's *Aureng Zebe*, and his *The Assination* was read "by the best judges."⁹⁷

The greatest influence on the dramatist in the years between 1660 and 1682 remained the dramatic context, and "the general public." Because the theaters were not subsidized, the box office receipts had to provide operating costs. Killigrew and Davenant were in business, and like all businessmen, wanted to turn a profit. As a result, they would have been deeply concerned about what went on the boards, at least as concerned as the playwright who wanted to sell his plays. The actors, holding shares in the company in return for their services, would also have been solicitous about play selection, production and "advertising." And the dramatist as anxious to please as to create something uniquely his would have paid attention to the crowd and what it was accepting or rejecting. The only reasonable conclusion to reach is that no single element had a controlling influence.

The method of advertising, play bills that were posted, hand bills that were scattered, and announcements that were made at the play houses, would suggest that the theater was trying hard to create interest.⁹⁸ These methods were designed, of course, to reach what the patentees thought to be the potential audience. The actresses sent their own hirees to the more wealthy and better connected because the odds were in favor of their attending. A large crowd meant large receipts, which meant hefty portions for the share holders. Some dramatists, like Dryden and apparently Lee,

⁹⁷Beljame, *Men of Letters*, p. 76.

⁹⁸*The London Stage, 1600-1700*, lxxv-lxcvii.

Crowne and D'Urfey, were share holders, along with the major established actors. They would have been theoretically more willing to work with a company concerned with profits than one that was not.

Dryden's 1668 arrangement with the King's Company, for instance, was for three plays a year at the same share as the three leading actors, Hart, Mohun, and Lacy.⁹⁹ For the less fortunate playwright, the dramatist's benefit on the third night was the main source of income. Without a benefit the poet would be forced to rely on the generosity of a patron or the successful sale of his play to a printer, neither of which was likely to prove dependable or lucrative. The actors, who were sharers and not "hirelings," would be most interested in gate receipts also because at this time there were no individual benefit nights for actors.¹⁰⁰ A playwright before 1682 had to please one of two managers, unless under contract to one house; the actors of a company for whom he may have tailored roles; and a small heterogeneous audience, initially more court-dominated but later more broadly based. It is therefore not surprising that actors like Betterton and Lacy managed and wrote too. It made marketing the drama, and doing the business of the theater much easier.

On the basis of what evidence exists, and we must admit that it is not conclusive evidence, we can say that the make-up and tastes of the

⁹⁹Ward, *The Life of John Dryden*, p. 57.

¹⁰⁰*The London Stage, 1600-1700*, lvii-lix and lxxxix. Cibber reports that the first actor's benefit was for Elizabeth Barry during the reign of James II.

theater audience between the reopening of the theaters in 1660 and the union of the two companies in 1682 can best be described as "shifting" from a Court crowd to varying degrees of domination by wits and cits. While the court and its circle were dominant for a decade, 1671 marked the beginning of a rise in the number of "citizens" and their influence as a group. Whether plays about wits, or cits, attracted wits, or cits; or if a large contingent of wits created a drama about wits, or cits, is impossible to determine. It is, however, evident that during the twenty-two years in question both the drama and the make-up of the audience changed. The result is that by the 1670's we have more references to citizens in the audience and more references to citizens in the plays.

In spite of the apparently larger number of "cits" by the 1670's, the audience remained small and heterogeneous until the political crisis of 1678, when the theaters became the tools of the warring factions. Wycherley's career, spanning the years 1671-76, covers the period when the citizens were becoming a more prominent and possibly more influential segment of the audience. By the time of the Third Anglo-Dutch War, they were necessary for the very survival of the two companies.

Until recently it has been customary to argue for a court-dominated theater audience because so much of the theater was for and about the fashionable; some of it mirrored the life of those in aristocratic circles and would logically be patronized by members of that circle. But at a time when the King employed bear and bull baiters, and rope-dancers at Whitehall; when men like Evelyn traveled to Southwark or Bartholomew Fairs to see cockfights, malformed animals and other oddities; it is not hard to believe that citizens and servants rubbed shoulders with royalty and the

upper class at the theater. And it is even less difficult to believe that when they became an economic force at the playhouses, their desires were considered.

IV

Restoration Comic Theory and Practice

While it is true that "many of the critical misunderstandings about Restoration drama have stemmed from misconceptions about the audience and its demands,"¹⁰¹ it is likewise true that misconceptions, or misleading generalizations about the nature of the drama itself, especially the comic drama, have contributed to many of these critical misunderstandings. With no evidence but the plays themselves, Macaulay, Beljame, L.C. Knights, and a host of others, described the audience of the Restoration theater as immoral, licentious, aristocratic debauchees who supported, and even inspired, a dissolute drama. Similarly, many critical commentaries of the past three decades support misconceptions about late seventeenth century dramatic theory and practice that have unfortunately achieved the status of commonplace truths. Those who describe the comic drama after 1660 as "comedy of manners," for example, argue that it eschews satire while simply reflecting the superficialities of an artificial society. Critics who support a "comedy of satire," on the other hand, justify the bawdy nature of some of the drama by arguing that the characterization it distorts is the object of its attack.¹⁰² Many of the studies that involve attempts to classify the drama of the period group artists as diverse as Dryden, Wycherley, and Congreve,

¹⁰¹Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century*, p. 24.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, chp. 1.

and generalize about a forty year span. It is not surprising that discussions of "Restoration dramatists" or "comedy of manners" conclude with generalizations that are nothing but misleading. No period is monolithic. And in any period, as Ten Eyck Perry correctly states, the comedy "cannot easily be tied down to laws and canons of criticism because its material is as varied and shifting as life itself."¹⁰³ The dramatic career of William Wycherley would lend credence to such a statement.

That the Restoration was indeed characterized by a complex diversity needs little illustration. The Civil War resulted in sweeping social changes and new attitudes in religious, political, and domestic life. With the political system and social framework undergoing profound change, it followed that Restoration writers, especially its highly public dramatists, would be spurred to experimentation and change. The diversity in dramatic emphasis, on plot, characters, wit, dialogue, spectacle, satire, which followed is evident in the changing work of individual dramatists and the dramatic productions of the period as a whole. Over the course of his dramatic career, John Dryden, for instance, produced tragi-comedies like *Marriage a la Mode*, heroic tragedies like *The Conquest of Granada*, and "domestic tragedies" like *All for Love*, very different plays, in response to either different demands, or his own changing ideas or both. The diversity of the period's literary thought is clearly evident in the difference in aim and method of contemporaries like the backward-looking Milton, the bawdy Rochester, and the moralistic Bunyan.

¹⁰³Harry Ten Eyck Perry, *The Comic Spirit in Restoration Drama: Studies in the Comedy of Etherege, Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh and Farquhar* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925), xi.

The evolution from the Elizabethan dramatic tradition, with the introduction of a new theatrical tradition complete with actresses, scenery, licensed theater groups, and the like, that accompanied the Restoration resulted in a profusion of new forms in both comedy and serious drama. This profusion of new and various theatrical material is sufficient "evidence of the experimental and innovative nature of early Restoration writing"¹⁰⁴ that defies meaningful generalization. Farquhar's "Discourse Upon Comedy," while appearing later in the century, paints a picture of a drama, and an audience probably much like the one Wycherley faced--an audience that had various demands and various segments:

The Scholar Calls upon us for *Decorums* and *Oeconomy*:
The Courtier crys out for *Wit* and *Purity of Style*: the
Citizens for *Humour* and *Ridicule*; The Divines threaten
us for *Immodesty*; and the Ladies will have an
Intreague.¹⁰⁵

When the theaters reopened, Sir William Davenant and Thomas Killigrew, the two holders of the royal patents, realized that they were in the process of either resuscitating a drama that had been comatose for

¹⁰⁴Robert D. Hume, *Dryden's Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 4.

¹⁰⁵George Farquhar, "Discourse Upon Comedy," *Eighteenth Century Critical Essays*, v. 1, ed. Scott Elledge (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1961), p. 142.

almost twenty-years¹⁰⁶ or creating a new one. Dryden for one believed that he was creating rather than reviving:

I was drawing the outlines of an art without any living master to instruct me in it. . . before the use of loadstone or knowledge of the compass. I was sailing in a vast ocean, without other help than the pole-star of the Ancients, and the rules of the French stage amongst the Moderns, which are extremely different from ours, by reason of their opposite taste.¹⁰⁷

Dryden and his contemporaries wrote in a century that has been described as "the greatest battleground" for the conflicting forces of "classicism and rationalism,"¹⁰⁸ the old versus the new, the Ancients versus the Moderns. This conflict, made manifest in the controversies over the use of blank verse or rhyme, the unities versus the mixing of plots, the comedy of wit versus the comedy of humours, encouraged the experimentation that characterizes the best drama of the period. And the discussion of these subjects, which frequently took place in the context of discussions about the nature and function of the dramatic arts, was usually supported by appeals to the reputation or position of literary predecessors or by appeals to the need for novelty.

¹⁰⁶Hyder E. Rollins, "A Contribution to the History of English Commonwealth Drama," *SP*, 18 (1921), pp. 267-333.

¹⁰⁷John Dryden, "A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire," in *Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Essays*, vol. 2, ed. George Watson (London: J.M. Gent and Sons, 1962), pp. 73-4. Unless otherwise noted, all references to Dryden's critical prose are from the Watson edition.

¹⁰⁸J.E. Spingarn, ed. *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), lxxxi.

The critical controversies of the period, termed "clichéd" in our time, sparked discussion and conclusions that underwent qualification and modification during the years of Wycherley's short career. Because Dryden, unlike most of his contemporaries, wrote about his craft and creation, his writings are one of the better sources of information about the craft of writing for the theater in the 1670's. Dryden's critical prefaces and his literary practice indicate the extent to which he experimented and allowed the results of that experimentation to inform his critical views. Over a period of years, his views on the use of rhyme changed, as did his views on the responsibility of the dramatist to teach. During his written debates with Thomas Shadwell, the period's foremost proponent of humours comedy, Dryden's initial position, that the poet's function was to entertain, was modified to include the secondary end of instruction.

Considering this period's developing ideas about the dramatic arts, and the variety of plays, it is meaningless to call Wycherley a writer of "manners" comedy, especially if he is to share this pigeon-hole with Congreve. It is equally meaningless to call Wycherley a writer of "humours" comedy if by that we mean the kind of comedy that Ben Jonson wrote. The question is whether we can describe the critical commonplace and the newly developing trends? And can we determine whether Wycherley knew or cared about them? To what extent is anything that Dryden or other writers of the age discussed of interest to William Wycherley? To what extent can we classify and categorize without oversimplifying? To what extent is Wycherley's practice the only fair statement of his intent? To what extent does an understanding of the discussion and practice help us understand the four plays that Wycherley left us?

The problems of determining a "theory" of comedy that Wycherley might have called his own is a formidable task. First of all, Wycherley did not comment directly on his practice or that of his contemporaries, something quite normal for his time. George Watson explains that "according to the accepted view of Dryden's day, the poet who explains himself condemns himself."¹⁰⁹ Add to this the fact that available remarks are generally brief, and made in prologues. Only Dryden, or one of his debaters, was likely to provide a detailed defense or explanation of a play, a poem, or a critical issue. Innovators, with the exception of Dryden, tended to remain silent. There was little reason to defend positions that were still evolving, or to participate in chatter if you felt yourself above it. Furthermore, if Wycherley had discussed his views on the nature and function of drama it is not likely that it would have been all that useful because his age, like ours, did not possess a universally acknowledged vocabulary for discussing such subjects. Any quick survey of the literature on this question yields a confusing array of literary terms, like "wit," "humours," "satire" with varied meanings.

The second major problem in reconstructing what we might call a "theory of comedy," by which we will mean a point of view that Wycherley might have called his own, is that many of the critical pronouncements of other writers were occasional, patently partisan, and justificatory in nature. Robert Hume, an expert in the drama of the late seventeenth century, issues two warnings that are worth keeping in mind. First Hume warns that "a strong case can be made for the charge that late seventeenth-century writers

¹⁰⁹George Watson, *Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Essays*, vii.

pay lip service to the inherited moral platitudes which they disregard in practice." This serves as a warning note to those who argue that what was discussed is what was created, and that therefore Dryden's commentary is the best guide to Dryden's drama. Hume's warning would suggest that the attempt is doomed from the outset, and that a compendium of critical pronouncements would only mislead the critic who sought to apply them to the works at hand. To accept the position that Wycherley must have known about the literary discussions between Shadwell and Dryden, for instance, is like arguing that someone could not write a play today without knowledge of scholarly discussions about the nature of modern comic theory. Secondly, Hume warns that that "Puritan outcry about the reopening of the theater induced a defensive attitude from the start, and the largest body of contemporary comment on the nature and function of comedy appears at the very end of the century in the form of answers to Jeremy Collier."¹¹⁰ This caveat rightly points out that the data we have are probably of dubious value.

The roots of the discussions of the first two decades after the Restoration, regardless of the individual critic's orientation, generally lie in the perceived merits or demerits of Elizabethan drama and the new, evolving drama, simply drama being produced for the newly licensed theaters. More specifically they usually involve a discussion of the end or the function of drama, whether it should instruct or/and entertain, and within that framework, a discussion of the relative merits of humours over wit characters, and assorted other subjects. The point is that some of the

¹¹⁰Hume, *Development of English Drama*, pp. 32-33.

defenders of pre-Restoration comedy, comedy or drama written or produced prior to 1660, adumbrating issues later and more vociferously raised by Collier, were asking if the new theater was less moral than the theater of the pre-Cromwell times. It is doubtful whether many readers of Restoration comedy would argue that any play is all "old" or all "new," and that including wit characters meant that you would not have any humours characters. Most playwrights of the day, including Wycherley, mixed features old and new, borrowed when necessary and created anew when able.

The notion that the duty of the poet is to recommend virtue and discountenance vice was espoused by both Bacon and Jonson in the early part of the seventeenth century. It would be expected that this notion got passed along and found advocates in the seventeenth century as it does today in works like John Gardner's *On Moral Fiction*. In what sounds like a late seventeenth century attack on the stage, Jonson decried the "Stage-Poetry" of his own day as "nothing but Ribaldry, Profanation, Blasphemy, al Licence of offence to God, and Man."¹¹¹ In order to counteract the concupiscence of the age, he felt it was "the Office of the Comick-Poet to imitate justice and instruct to life," "to inform men in the best reason of living."¹¹² Jonson felt, as Dryden did later, that his remarks were necessary

¹¹¹Ben Jonson, *Preface to Sejanus, Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, vol. 1.ed. J.E. Spingarn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), p. 12. Hereafter Spingarn.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, p. 15.

because the "multitude commends writers as they do Fencers or Wrastlers".¹¹³

Nothing in our Age, I have observed, is more preposterous than the running Judgments upon Poetry and Poets; when we shall heare these things commended and cry'd up for the best writings, which a man would scarce vouchsafe to wrap any wholesome drug in; nor would never light his Tobacco with them. . . .¹¹⁴

As a corrective to what he perceived to be the false poetry that ruled the stage, Jonson advocated, in *Timber*, a fidelity to nature as opposed to an idealized mimesis. By fidelity to nature, Jonson meant that it was the duty of the artist to hold a mirror to life and in the process represent life in such a way that entertainment and moral good would result. In order to provide "pleasure and profit," wrote Jonson, an author must imitate that which is "right and proper" because "no doctrine will doe good where nature is wanting."¹¹⁵ A drama so conceived would have as its subject actions that show virtue rewarded and vice punished, and characters who exhibit characteristics, exaggerated, but likely to be found in human nature. Remarks like these, and a belief that "nothing [is] more ridiculous than to make an Author a Dictator, as the schools have done with Aristotle,"¹¹⁶

¹¹³Jonson, "Timber, of Discoveries," Spingarn, I. p. 19.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 203.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.* p. 43.

illustrate the extent to which Jonson, and possibly others in Wycherley's time, could have a foot in both the ancient and the modern world. Because Jonson's experience as a writer proved the worth of reading the best writers, hearing the best speakers, and developing a personal style, what he is describing is really a question of emphasis, and not an issue of exclusion. Jonson was clearly not opposed to novel representations, he just expected that the artist would create for the edification of his audience.

Echoing Jonson's acceptance of the new were mid-seventeenth century critics like William Davenant, who in his Preface to *Gondibert* (1650) professed himself "secure in believing that a Poet, who hath wrought with his own instruments at a new design, is no more answerable for disobedience to Predecessors, then Law-makers are liable to those old Laws which themselves have repealed."¹¹⁷ But Davenant also, like the ancients, believed that stylistic innovations must be circumscribed by a utility, believing that "Poets are of all moralists the most useful."¹¹⁸

In his "Answer to Davenant" written in the same year, Thomas Hobbes, one of the most influential thinkers of the day, endorsed the position that literature has a didactic function: "The poet's work it is, by imitating humane life in delightful and measur'd lines, to avert men from Vice and incline them to virtuous and honorable actions."¹¹⁹ Hobbes,

¹¹⁷Davenant, "Preface to *Gondibert*," Spingarn, II, p. 20.

¹¹⁸Thomas Hobbes, "Answer to Davenant's Preface to *Gondibert*." Spingarn, II, p. 49.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

sounding like Sidney, is expressing a belief in a drama which has as its subject real human concerns, and which teaches by virtue of its isolating an action, or a point of view, a folly or a fault. According to Hobbes, the mechanical universe impresses the mind which retains, arranges, and combines its impressions: "Time and Education beget experience; Experience begets memory; memory begets Judgment and Fancy: Judgment begets the strength and structure, and Fancy begets the ornament of a Poem."¹²⁰ And this is the point of view that Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson will support decades later. As the foregoing suggests, the distinction between fancy and judgment, along with the belief in the moral utility of poetry, was often repeated, and it was repetition that conferred the status of dicta.

Suffice it to say that given the general nature of the foregoing remarks the only reaction we would anticipate from contemporaries of Jonson and Davenant is a big yawn. Nothing that is being said here is specific or radical enough to cause too much excitement.

Given that there is no such thing as all "old" or all "new", the critical issues really deal with emphasis and point of view. Simply stated there was a school of thought that believed the proper subject of art was nature, viewed through the rational and moral eyes of an artist. The artist's job was to look, select, and create with an eye toward instruction. Because judgment was the controlling skill, only useful objects or subjects in nature were suitable for drama. This school preferred humours comedy because it did not allow fancy to dominate representations of reality. When fancy filtered reality for the material of art, judgment, while still present, took a

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 59.

backseat to novel representations of human nature. Because wit comedy, with its luxuriant style, lacked the more obviously discriminating filter that one saw in the less fancy-free creations of humours comedy where the emphasis was on judgment, it could easily be judged as amoral if not immoral. To those that expected overt moral lessons, the "wit" or the "new" comedy was almost what might later have been termed a wit for wit's sake creation.

At the risk of oversimplifying let me say that the period saw supporters of a dominating fancy in drama, the comedy of wit, at odds with those who believed that judgment is necessary to rein in fancy, and was therefore requisite in any stage work. According to the Jonsonian, one of the ways that judgment controlled fancy was by producing didactic, well-plotted, virtue-rewarded actions peopled by characters with exaggerated human tendencies. Dryden and Wycherley were for a time proponents of what Dryden, in his Preface to *An Evening's Love* (1671), called the "mixed mode," a mode that blended the product of fancy with the product of judgment, the comedy of wit with the comedy of humours, characters and dialogue of luxuriant style mixed with humours characters who by their nature were representative of human follies. In addition, they both mixed serious and comic plots, the heroic with a more elevated treatment of a more serious issue, with the comic, a low treatment of a serious, although comic, issue. It would be facile to suggest that Dryden and Wycherley simply combined the wit comedy refined from the example of Beaumont and Fletcher with the existing and still popular humours comedy of Jonson. These do, however, appear to be the primary influences at work by 1670-75 and the focus of what critical discussions there were.

But not all believed in a poetry that was primarily didactic. Cowley, like Waller, and later Dryden (though his position was modified throughout the 70's), believed that the "main end of Poesie" is "to communicate delight to others."¹²¹ Its proper subject is not nature as it exists, but rather "things and persons imagined by poets."¹²² This was the quality that Thomas Sprat lauded in Cowley: His representations of "the humours and affections of others" that were the creations of his own mind.¹²³

The practices of Beaumont and Jonson became the touchstones for discussing the idea of the comic after the reopening of the theaters. This classification forms the framework for the first formal piece of theatrical criticism in English, "A Short Discourse of the English Stage"(1664), in which Richard Flecknoe denigrated the English theater. To begin, Flecknoe disparaged the English theater's weak plotting, "the chief fault being the "shuffling too much matter together" unlike the French who have fewer faults because "they confine themselves to narrower limits."¹²⁴ Mixing what would be two distinct issues for his generation, Flecknoe believed the French were more observant of unities of time, place, and action as in

¹²¹Abraham Cowley, Preface to Poems," Spingarn, II. p. 81.

¹²²*Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹²³Thomas Sprat, "An Account of the Life an Writings of Mr. Abraham Cowley," Spingarn, II, p. 133.

¹²⁴Richard Flecknoe, "A Short Discourse of the English Stage," Spingarn, II, p. 93.

Moliere, and were therefore better at developing plots. As far as the end of drama was concerned, Flecknoe subscribed to an "ancient's" point of view. He, like many of his contemporaries, believed that "its chiefest end is to render Folly ridiculous, Vice odious, and Virtue and Noblenesse so amiable and lovely, as every one shu'd be delighted and enamoured with it."¹²⁵ Even though Flecknoe was not a spokesman for the age, he did have the foresight to see that the dichotomy between the wit camp, which simply stated favored fancy over judgment, and the judgment or humours camp, which simply stated favored judgment over fancy, would be more and more a concern of Restoration playwrights and critics. When he compared Jonson to Fletcher, Flecknoe concluded that the difference is basically that "betwixt Wit and Judgment: Wit being an exuberant thing, . . . but Judgment, a stayed and reposed thing, always containing it self within its bounds and limits."¹²⁶ When faced with the choice of emphasizing wit or judgment, it was primarily the Restoration's comic writer's notion of the function and end of art that helped determine which to emphasize in what almost always was a blend, as in the case of Wycherley.

The popularity of burgeoning "wit," and its emphasis on dialogue and characterization, was pronounced enough to attract the censure of the Royal Society. Interested, in part, in helping to bring the English language to perfection, the Royal Society, wrote Sprat, has "been most rigorous in putting in execution the only remedy that can be found for this

¹²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 94.

extravagance, and that has been a constant resolution to reject all amplifications, digressions, and swelling of style; to return back to the primitive purity and shortness, when man deliver'd so many things almost in an equal number of words."¹²⁷ The extravagance he speaks of is this "vicious abundance of Phrase, this trick of metaphors, this volubility of Tongue"¹²⁸ which had so overrun England that the preachers had become "conceited" enough to warrant heated excoriations on saner methods of preaching."¹²⁹ Though Sprat was not talking about the theater, it is apparent that the abuse of language was so prevalent in the nontheatrical world also that it required censure. But wit had its supporters, as well as its detractors.

Some modern critics of Restoration comedy believe that the notions expressed by Wycherley's contemporaries on the moral efficacy of literature are nothing more than clichés and platitudes uttered by people trying to lend a seriousness to their trivial creations. To some Restoration writers, however, these notions were hardly clichés. Almost all of the better-known writers of the day eventually, as in Dryden's case, expressed a belief in the poet's responsibility to instruct. It is probable that at least some of the comments were intended as statements of position. With the increasing demand for entertaining wit, which instructed but not in a

¹²⁷Thomas Sprat, From *The History of the Royal Society of London*, Spingarn, II, pp. 117-18.

¹²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 117.

¹²⁹Spingarn, *Introduction to Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, xliv.

manner that the humours school found so apparent, supporters of edifying judgment, which entertained but not in so luxuriant and clever a way as the newer witty plays, went on record advocating an emphasis on the need for instruction. Nat Lee's "Prologue" to *Gloriana*(1676), for instance, suggests the extent to which wit had inundated the land five years after Shadwell and Dryden's exchange on the subject:

Wit which was formerly but Recreation
Is now become the Business of the Nation.¹³⁰

Thomas Durfey's Prologue to *A Fond Husband*(1677) echoes Lee's observation that wit, luxuriant style, dialogue and repartee, and not careful plotting, ruled the day:

If Plot and Bus'ness Comical and New
Could please the Criticks that sit here to view,
The Poet might have thought this Play would do.
But in this Age Design no praise can get:
You cry it Conversation wants, and Wit,
As if the obvious Rules of Comedy,
Were only dull *Grimace* and *Repartee*.¹³¹

The pro-wit camp got support from Dryden, who believed that repartee was "the very soul of conversation" and therefore "the greatest

¹³⁰Nathaniel Lee, *Prologue to Gloriana, The Works of Nathaniel Lee*, vol. 1, eds., Thomas B. Stroup and Arthur L. Cooke (New Brunswick, N.J. : The Scarecrow Press, 1954), p. 152.

¹³¹Thomas Durfey, *Prologue to A Fond Husband*, quoted in Singh, p. 204.

grace of comedy."¹³² In keeping with his own penchant for wit comedy, the Poet Laureate argued that the chief end of comedy was "divertisement and delight."¹³³ Those who advocated wit comedy, like those who opposed it, were attempting to deal with the question of the relationship of morality and art. While Dryden was supporting wit in comedy, an opposing group was supporting an emphasis on humours. When John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave and a so-called "court wit," condemned "that silly thing men call sheer wit" in his "Essay upon Poetry"(1682), he was advocating that dramatists "employ [their] careful thoughts on plot and humours":

That silly thing men call Sheer Wit avoid
With which our Age so nauseously is cloy'd;
Humour is all, and 'tis the top of wit
T' express agreeable a thing that's fit.¹³⁴

To control "Sheer Wit" Mulgrave proposed a "true wit" which "like the Sun. . . is by all admired." Seconding Dryden's definition of wit as propriety of word and thought, Mulgrave argued for a spirit which would inspire the whole work:

As all is dullness when the Fancy's bad,
So without Judgment, Fancy is but mad;
And Judgment has a boundless influence.
Not upon words alone, or any sence,
But on the whole of manners, and of men:

¹³²Dryden, *Preface to An Evening's Love*, I, p. 149.

¹³³*Ibid.*, p. 152.

¹³⁴John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave, "Essay on Poetry," Spingarn, II, p. 294.

Fancy is but the Feather of the Pen;
Reason is that substantial, useful part,
Which gains the Head, while t'other wins the Heart.¹³⁵

Mulgrave's preference for poetry that blends fancy and judgment to the end of moral instruction predictably made him a champion of the satiric. In his "Essay on Satire"(1679) he commended satire as

the boldest way perhaps the best,
To show men freely all their foulest faults,
To laugh at their vain Deeds, and vainer
Thoughts.¹³⁶

Those who argue that wits like Mulgrave were simply paying lip service to the classical ideal have no more evidence than those who would argue that these are serious, well thought out conclusions on the nature of art.

Most of what is said about the dissolute behavior of "wits" today was also said in Wycherley's day. And Dryden's response to the assessment of the wits as a radical group remains most appropriate:

We have, like them [the Ancients] our genial rights, Where our discourse is neither too serious, nor too light, but always pleasant, and for the most part instructive: the railery neither too sharp upon the present, nor too censorious on the absent; and the cups only such as will raise the conversation of the night, without disturbing the business of the morrow.¹³⁷

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 287. See also Spingarn's Introduction, xxix.

¹³⁶John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave, "Essay on Satire," quoted in Wilson, *The Court Wits of the Restoration*, p. 113.

¹³⁷Dryden, Preface to *The Assignation*, I, p 186.

The wits were not monsters of cupidity and lust. And even if their behavior was free, they, like Scroope, could still believe that "Nothing helps more than Satyr, to amend/Ill manners, or is trulier Virtue's Friend."¹³⁸ And even if their behavior was a bit more than free, it does not follow from that the "Court wits" would not be interested in mixing edification and entertainment for the audience, and in examining questions of morality and ethics.

So, what modern discussions have labeled cliches were probably not cliches to the period. Mulgrave may have been a conceited dilettante, but his position in the "Essay" was roundly supported and admired. The Earl of Roscommon praised Mulgrave "whose correct Essay/Repairs so well our old Horatian way."¹³⁹ Dryden read the essay "over and over with much Delight, and as much instruction."¹⁴⁰ Mulgrave's notions are ones that Wycherley and his contemporaries inherited and probably accepted. From Jonson, through Buckingham, Mulgrave, Rochester, to Blackmore and Dennis, critic after critic, poet after poet, reputable and not, expressed a belief in the power of literature, thus encouraging in part the plethora of

¹³⁸Sir Carr Scroope, "A Satyr Upon the Follies of the Men of the Age," quoted in *The Court Wits of the Restoration*, pp. 112-13.

¹³⁹Wentworth Dillon, Earl of Roscommon, "An Essay on Translated Verse," Spingarn, II, p. 297.

¹⁴⁰Dryden, quoted in *The Court Wits of the Restoration*, p. 193.

satiric literature of the day. Whether they were in fact "not much concerned with instruction"¹⁴¹ only their practice will prove.

A second argument in support of a comedy with an instructive purpose has to do with the extent to which we can call Wycherley a satirist, and what his age meant by the appellation so frequently associated with his name. One writer argues that an age uncomfortable with moral judgments produces an "intellectual and moral climate utterly hostile to genuinely satiric comedy."¹⁴² Rather than being an age uncomfortable with moral judgments, the Restoration was uncomfortable with one group making all of the judgments. As Roger Sharrock's assessment shows, "When we pass from Bunyan and Milton," he argues, "to those great writers of the age who were conscious of the demands of their society and anxious to express them, Butler, Rochester, Dryden. . . , we see that the satiric attitude is dominant in the best work of all of them."¹⁴³ Because it was a society questioning its values, it was a society ripe for satire. Indeed the struggle to find a foothold in the modern age, which began for England in the late seventeenth century and continued into the succeeding age, resulted in what

¹⁴¹Krutch, *Comedy and Conscience After the Restoration*, p. 77. See Chp. 4.

¹⁴²Singh, *The Theory of Drama in the Restoration Period*, p. 232.

¹⁴³Roger Sharrock, "Modes of Satire," *Restoration Theatre*, eds. John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1965), p. 109. See also Charles O. McDonald, "Restoration Comedy as Drama or Satire: An Investigation into Seventeenth-Century Aesthetics," *SP*, 61 (1964), pp. 544-52.

Matthew Arnold would later call an "epoch of expansion"¹⁴⁴ that helped produce some of the greatest satire in the English language.

Given the foregoing, it is evident that some Restoration writers were trying to decide how to move forward, whether to abandon the Elizabethan mode of Jonson and Beaumont and Fletcher, to build on it, or to create a new drama for the new age. The ensuing inquiry and the dramatic creations produced discussion and debate. Admittedly the defenses of wit comedy at the end of the century were clearly attempts to weaken or break the force of Collier's attack. But before Collier's attack, when criticism was in its infancy, there was little reason to defend present practice if the popular taste deemed it acceptable. As a result there is not a large body of critical and theoretical prose passed to succeeding ages. There was, however, one important late seventeenth-century critical discussion between Dryden and Shadwell that illustrates what ideas were at least being debated, and more importantly what significance we can attach to them. As the most detailed critical debate of the late 60's and early 70's, it has the potential to provide more of a context for a discussion of Wycherley's practice than the general notions already examined. My intent is to summarize the debate without distorting the issues.

Dryden's most important statement on comedy, in the preface to *An Evening's Love* (1671), resulted from a clash with Shadwell that highlighted the fundamental divergence between an emphasis on either wit or humour, dialogue and character or plot, in comedy. More specifically,

¹⁴⁴See Matthew Arnold, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," *Criticism: The Major Texts*, ed. Walter Jackson Bate (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), pp. 452-65.

this discussion ranged over the relative merits and demerits of the comedy of repartee and the comedy of humours, the right of an author to borrow from ancient and modern authors, the dramatic skills of Ben Jonson, the rationale of the heroic tragedy, and the relative importance of pleasing the public and instructing it.¹⁴⁵

The debate began in the Preface to *The Sullen Lovers* (1668) where Shadwell attacked the comedy of wit in what was really a spirited defense of Ben Jonson, a poet he clearly held in high esteem. In decrying "the Playes which have been wrote of late," he argued that "there is no such thing as a perfect Character, . . . the two chief persons [of wit comedy] are most commonly a Swearing, Drinking, Whoring Ruffian for a lover, and an impudent, ill-bred *Tomrig* for a Mistress, and these are the fine people of the play."¹⁴⁶ The comedy of Ben Jonson, on the other hand, ought to be imitated by contemporaries because it is the only comedy peopled with "perfect representations of Human Life."¹⁴⁷ What had prompted Shadwell's defense was a remark of Dryden's in the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*. "One cannot say," Dryden stated on the subject of Jonson's wit, "that he wanted wit, but rather that he was frugal of it."¹⁴⁸ Considering that "Humour was his proper sphere," that is, the one he chose to work and excel in, this

¹⁴⁵See R. Jack Smith, "Shadwell's Impact Upon John Dryden," *RES*, 20 (1944), p. 30.

¹⁴⁶Shadwell, Preface to *The Sullen Lover*, Spingarn, II, p. 150.

¹⁴⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸Dryden, "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy," I, p. 69.

remark of Dryden's seems more descriptive than evaluative. Regardless of the equitableness of Dryden's assessment of Jonson, Shadwell took exception to it. One wonders if he was more anti-Dryden than anti-repartee, especially considering that he continues his attack by accusing Dryden of plagiarism.

A year later the "son of Ben" fired a second round at the comedy of wit, again for its immorality. In the Preface to *The Royal Shepherdess* (1669), Shadwell accused writers of wit comedy of encouraging vice "by bringing the characters of debauch'd People upon the stage, and making them pass for fine gentlemen, who openly profess Swearing, Drinking, Whoring, Breaking Windows, and beating Constables."¹⁴⁹ A year earlier in "The Defense of An Essay of Dramatic Poesy," Dryden had remarked that as a poet his "chief endeavours are to delight the age," because "to please the people ought to be the poet's aim."¹⁵⁰ The fact that Dryden believed delight to be the "chief, if not the only end of poesy,"¹⁵¹ was at this time abhorrent to Shadwell who retorted that "he who debases himself to think of nothing but pleasing the Rabble loses the dignity of a Poet."¹⁵² Dryden

¹⁴⁹Thomas Shadwell, Preface to *The Royal Shepherdess*, *The Complete Works of Thomas Shadwell*, vol. 1, ed. Montague Summers (London: The Fortune Press, 1927), p. 100.

¹⁵⁰Dryden, "A Discourse on the Original and Progress of Satire," II, p. 120.

¹⁵¹Dryden, "Defense of an Essay of Dramatic Poesy," I, p. 113.

¹⁵²Shadwell, *Preface to The Royal Shepherdess*, *Complete Works*, I, p. 100.

most probably meant pleasing by entertaining instruction, and not pandering. And while it is true that wit comedy probably required greater involvement on the part of the audience, because the characters that are not exemplary are not all bad, and characters that are good are not all good, Shadwell is really arguing for character types, humours characters, characters that are emblematic of a virtue or vice, over the less emblematic, more developed and ambiguous characterization of the increasingly popular wit comedy.

Before he proceeded to the full-scale reply in the "Preface" to *An Evening's Love*, Dryden reiterated his stand on the issue of the end and function of poetry and staunchly defended his initial position. Adumbrating a discussion of poetic justice in comedy, Dryden replied to Shadwell's latest charge by stating that "if we see in our theatres the examples of Vice rewarded, or at least unpunished; yet it ought not to be an argument against the art any more than the extravagances and impieties of the pulpit in the late times of rebellion can be against the office and dignity of the clergy."¹⁵³ In the Preface to *An Evening's Love*, an essay in defense of his own dramatic practice, Dryden was doing what the age was occupied in doing -- feeling his way along, modifying and qualifying when reason demanded. He began by setting up a hierarchy of poetry in which comedy is "inferior to all sorts of dramatic writing."¹⁵⁴ Because "it may reasonably be inferred that comedy is not so much obliged to the

¹⁵³Dryden, *Preface to Tyrannic Love*, I, p. 139.

¹⁵⁴Dryden, *Preface to An Evening's Love*, I, p. 145.

punishment of faults which it represents as tragedy," comedy in general is inferior. It must of necessity deemphasize the instructive plot in favor of entertaining dialogue because its subject, the follies and frailties of human nature, is lower:

For the persons in comedy are of a lower quality,
the action is little; and the faults and vices are
but the sallies of youth, and the frailties of human
nature, and not the premeditated crime: such to which
all men are obnoxious, not such as are attempted only
by a few, and those abandoned to all sense of virtue:
such as move pity and commiseration, not detestation
and horror; such in short, as may be forgiven, not
such as must of necessity be punished.¹⁵⁵

In tragedy, conversely, "where the actions and persons are great, and the crimes horrid, the laws of justice are more strictly observed."¹⁵⁶ In the category of comic dramatic writing we are not surprised to see wit comedy elevated to a status above that of the comedy of humours. Because the chief end of comedy is "divertisement and delight," wit comedy deserves the foremost ranking. Because comedy is not obliged to punish faults, Dryden reasoned that he can not reasonably be charged with making debauched people his heroes. The fact that Dryden's characters are happy at the play's close does not violate Shadwell's law of comedy that states that virtue is to be rewarded and vice punished. Dryden knows "no such law to have been constantly observed in comedy, either by the ancient or modern poets,"¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 151.

¹⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 150.

either by Terence or Ben Jonson. For Dryden comedy has as its subject that which is not the subject of tragedy; the subject of comedy is less serious, and the absence of precedent makes present treatment acceptable.

Allied to the question of morality of characters is the question of the relationship between art and morality in general. Shadwell's charges put Dryden on the defensive, enough so that he was forced to modify an earlier position that "instruction can be admitted as an end of poetry but in the second place, for poesy only instructs as it delights."¹⁵⁸ This position, attacked by Shadwell in the Preface to *The Royal Shepherdess*, is qualified by Dryden in the 1671 Preface. Rather than a defense of delight as the end of poetry, Dryden decided that instruction can only be a secondary end of comedy because "the business of the comic poet is to make you laugh: when he writes humours, he makes folly ridiculous; when wit he moves you, if not always to laughter, yet to a pleasure that is more noble."¹⁵⁹

During the year of Wycherley's first play, the debate continued in the Preface to *The Humorist* (1671) and the "Defense of the Epilogue." The focus moved from whether or not the poet's role is to entertain or instruct to the relative merits of wit and humours comedy. Dryden had previously remarked that "to make men appear pleasantly ridiculous on the stage was . . . Jonson's talent; and in this he needed not the acumen of wit; but that of judgment."¹⁶⁰ Here Dryden seems to be suggesting a relationship between

¹⁵⁸Dryden, "A Defense of an Essay on Dramatic Poesy," I, pp. 113-14.

¹⁵⁹Dryden, *Preface to An Evening's Love*, I, p. 152.

¹⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 148.

judgment and instruction. Recording the follies of man requires observation and "observation is an effect of judgment." Given these assumptions, Jonson's success, according to Dryden, had nothing at all to do with his wit, or "the sharpness of conceit," one of the requisites of wit. He owes his success to "the natural imitation of folly," which he carried out in the humours genre. Because wit or repartee is the greatest grace of comedy, according to Dryden, and it is wanting in Jonson, and because Jonson writes to ridicule, which does not move the audience to a pleasure more noble, his humours comedy, Dryden concludes, is inferior to wit comedy. Dryden's position is clearly that of a "modern." He placed the mantle of "modern" on himself when he went on to state that his belief in progress enabled him "to profess to have no other ambition in this essay than that poetry may not go backward, where all other arts and sciences are advancing."¹⁶¹

With Shadwell's reply to Dryden's Preface to *An Evening's Love* in 1671 it is evident that theirs is a problem of semantics. It is not my intent to cover the wide-ranging discussion of "wit" but simply to suggest some obvious differences between Shadwell and Dryden. For one, they each mean something quite different when they use the word "wit." For Dryden, wit was "sharpness of conceit," and propriety of word and thought, while for Shadwell "wit" was "the invention of remote and pleasant thoughts of what kind so ever."¹⁶² For Shadwell "wit" was fancy controlled by

¹⁶¹Dryden, "Defense of the Epilogue," I, p. 169.

¹⁶²Shadwell, *Preface to The Humorists, Complete Works*, I, p. 188. See the discussion of the meaning of "wit" during the Restoration in Thomas Fujimura, *The Restoration Comedy of Wit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952).

judgment, for Dryden wit was repartee. Shadwell's defense of the humours characterization illustrates the point:

Nor can I think to the writing of [Jonson's] humours, which were not only the follies but vices and subtleties of men, that wit was not required, but judgment; where by the way, they speak as if judgment; were a less thing than wit. But certainly it was meant otherwise by nature, who subjected wit to the government of judgment, which is the noblest faculty of the mind. Fancy roughdraws, but judgment smooths and finishes; nay, judgment does indeed comprehend wit, for no man can have that who has not wit.¹⁶³

Shadwell is suggesting that judgment, in which Jonson had no equal, includes wit. We are therefore left to conclude Jonson's art is superior to that art which is the result of fancy or wit, but which lacks a Jonsonian kind of judgment. And judgment in drama is superior because it is associated with, or produces, instruction. Concerning the end of poetry, Shadwell takes "leave to Dissent from those who seem to insinuate that the ultimate end of a Poet is to delight, without correction or instruction."¹⁶⁴

Dryden, ever the practical man, had modified his initial position, but this did not prevent one of the "Sons of Ben" from uttering what present-day commentators label a seventeenth-century cliché: "I confess a Poet ought to do all that he can decently to please, that so he may

¹⁶³Shadwell, *Preface to The Humorists*, *Complete Works*, I, pp. 187-88.

¹⁶⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 183-84.

instruct."¹⁶⁵ With this pronouncement Shadwell and Dryden are just about in the same camp.

A remaining difference between the two men and their respective camps was the extent to which one adhered to the principle of poetic justice in comedy.¹⁶⁶ "For the sake of goodmen," Shadwell states, "ill should be punished. . . . I must confess it were ill-nature, and below a man to fall upon natural imperfections of men, as of Lunaticks, Ideots, or men born monstrous." While these are not the proper subjects of satire," the affected vanities and artificial fopperies of men, which. . .they take pains to acquire,"¹⁶⁷ are.

Clearly, the Shadwell-Dryden debate has as its basis a confrontation between a supporter of the traditional and one of the evolutionary. In their discussion is the opposition of the Elizabethan and the contemporary, the comedy of judgment versus the comedy of fancy or wit, the comedy that has as its chief end instruction versus one that sought to please first. Even though they were at times in agreement or not far apart, and even though they were not disinterested in their approaches, the importance of these exchanges is that they probably helped encourage experimentation. The theorizing of some of the Restoration critics, like Dryden and Milton, for example, is by its own standards more than clichéd.

¹⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 184.

¹⁶⁶Wycherley metes out a kind of poetic justice by punishing some of his fools with an undesirable marriage. This is not to suggest, however, that Wycherley subscribed to Shadwell's belief in poetic justice in comedy.

¹⁶⁷Shadwell, *Preface to The Humorist*, *Complete Works*, I, p. 184.

In the case of Shadwell and Dryden, we have two practicing dramatists who altered their own dramatic productions, as well as their views on the theoretical aspects of their craft as the years passed. Because Dryden's critical work was initially an adjunct to his literary endeavors, his ideas changed as his practice changed. The same holds for Shadwell whose pronouncements it is pointless to attempt to invalidate because his own practice later deviated from his stated position. The fact is that in 1668 when Shadwell's first play, *The Sullen Lovers*, hit the boards he put into practice the proposition that the business of comedy was to encourage virtue rather than simply depict without judgment the contemporary scene. Shadwell's opposition to what John Harrington Smith calls the "nonexemplary" mode that had dominated early Restoration comedy ushered in an exemplary mode that "put reform first and meant to accomplish it by representing not things as they were but standards as they ought to be."¹⁶⁸ By the mid-70's, when the "sex-comedy" of Etherege and Wycherley was the model for aspiring playwrights, Shadwell began operating in the mainstream, though he later returned to the exemplary mode with *The Squire of Alsatia*.¹⁶⁹ At this point, the exemplary mode was about as commonplace as the established dramatic mode.¹⁷⁰ Reproving Shadwell for

¹⁶⁸Smith, "Shadwell, the Ladies, and the Change in Comedy," *MP*, 46 (1948), p. 24.

¹⁶⁹See Hume, *The Development of Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century*, pp. 79-80; Smith, *MP*, 46 (1948), p. 30; and Smith, *The Gay Couple in Restoration Comedy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1948), pp. 120-30.

¹⁷⁰Smith, "Shadwell, the Ladies, and the Change in Comedy," *MP*, 46 (1948), p. 24.

avowing a moral drama and writing an immoral one does not alter the impact that the dialogue with Dryden had on his contemporaries. While the discussion carried on by these two men was probably well known, and while the positions were probably each supported by a host of practitioners, actors, and the public at large, it is safe to conclude that this information is of interest but not too useful in elucidating the art of Wycherley.

In summary, then, Dryden's idea of progress supplied the foundation for his theoretical discussion of the nature of the comic drama. He objected that the writer of Jonsonian comedy was merely "a common craftsman, an exact observer, a realist, a man of judgment." In contrast, the true artist in an age "more courtly" than the last, the writer of repartee, is a master craftsman, "who possesses fancy as well as judgment."¹⁷¹ The best comedy delights by moving an audience to a pleasure more noble than the laughter that results from ridicule. For Shadwell, the end of comedy was instruction, and a humours based comedy which represents some extravagance of mankind, and where the fancy is reined in by judgment, achieved this end most successfully. Even though some critics contend that the mixing of modes, combining wit and humors, comedy and tragedy, prose and verse, was not respectable,¹⁷² Dryden, interestingly, approved most of the "mixed way of comedy": "that which is neither all wit, or all humour,

¹⁷¹George Robert Guffey, *Textual Notes to An Evening's Love, The Works of John Dryden*, vol. 10 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), p. 448.

¹⁷²Chadwick, *The Four Plays of William Wycherley*, pp. 17-18.

but the result of both."¹⁷³ What separates the two then is in part the emphasis that each ingredient should receive. The practice of Wycherley shows that balancing fancy and judgment, wit and humours, became an important consideration in the creation of his four plays.

The foregoing summary of the Shadwell-Dryden discussion and the occasional remarks on the comic drama of the day made by others, while long, illustrates a point worth emphasizing: even the most complete discussion yielded little more than positioning, defending, and generalizing that at times was contradicted in practice. Critics can go to great lengths, as some have, such as Fujimura and Empson, to define terms like wit with what they believe is great accuracy, but the likelihood is that the plays themselves tell more about what Wycherley thought of comic drama, than the total of the prefaces, prologues or occasional remarks.

It is true that Dryden was a very influential man -- he was after all Poet Laureate-- and as an accomplished writer of practical criticism, and as the premier dramatist of 60's and 70's, his ideas would have had wide currency.¹⁷⁴ Wycherley's own praise of Dryden was sustained and apparently sincere:

Your clear, unerring universal Sense
Cheers like the Sun with gen'ral Influence:
New wonders still profusely does display,
And drives the darkness of the mind away.

¹⁷³Dryden, *Preface to An Evening's Love*, I, p. 149.

¹⁷⁴Hugh MacDonald, "The Attacks on Dryden," *Essential Articles for the Study of John Dryden*, ed. H.T. Swedenberg, Jr. (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1966).

But your enlight'ning, comprehensive Mind
Cannot be to a single sphere confin'd . . .¹⁷⁵

Wycherley's admiration of Dryden was enough that at one point he considered collaborating with Dryden but withdrew eventually "out of deference, ostensibly, to a greater poet."¹⁷⁶ The likelihood that he made a point of receiving the town's latest intelligence concerning Dryden and the writer's craft is made clear in a letter to John Sheffield, the Earl of Mulgrave, in the summer of 1677. Reporting on the London news, he informs Sheffield that the King is in Plymouth, the town is empty, the whores are poxed, and there is no "Poetical News, for Dryden is in Northampton-Shire."¹⁷⁷ Obviously by the mid-70's Wycherley and Dryden were on good terms, and Wycherley was interested in his "poetical-News."

While Gildon may have been correct in his observation that Wycherley was a "Gentlemen-Writer" who "writ not for Benefit, or ever made it his Livelihood,"¹⁷⁸ he was nevertheless, a serious playwright.¹⁷⁹ As has been established, the fact that he left no commentary or theory on his craft is not unusual. Theorizing in print was new with Dryden;

¹⁷⁵Quoted by McCarthy, *William Wycherley: A Biography*, p. 102. See Summers, IV, pp. 155-60 for the entire poem.

¹⁷⁶McCarthy, *William Wycherley: A Biography*, p. 48.

¹⁷⁷*Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁷⁸Charles Gildon, quoted in *The Restoration Comedy of Wit*, p. 126.

¹⁷⁹B. Eugene McCarthy, *William Wycherley: A Biography*, (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1979), p. 46. See also Chadwick, *The Four Plays of William Wycherley*, p. 45.

commentary is absent from the work of most Restoration playwrights, and the pronouncements made by those who chose to be daring in a prologue or epilogue were often as we have seen generalized and occasional statements. But silence should not be confused with indifference; Wycherley was probably enough interested in the critical controversies of the day that they helped shape his first play, *Love in a Wood*, produced in the spring of 1671. Wycherley was aware that "They, who have best succeeded on the stage,/Have still conformed their genius to their age."¹⁸⁰ It is probably more than coincidence that Wycherley's first play follows the mixed-mode ideal set down by Dryden. While Wycherley's original genius would eventually be his guide, we must imagine that at the outset he welcomed assistance.

V

Wycherley The Man

The recreation of a milieu, in this case a theatrical milieu and a discussion of comic theory, are not the only critical perspectives from which to view Restoration comedy and the art of William Wycherley. Because so often judgments are made about satire based on the supposed personality of the satirist, it is worth taking a look at the relevance of Wycherley's sketchy biography to any analysis of plays.

Some critical discussions have as their foundation a notion about Wycherley the man. Some argue that because he was misanthropic he wrote

¹⁸⁰John Dryden, "Epilogue to the Second Part of *The Conquest of Granada*, vol. 1, ed. W.P. Ker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), p. 160.

The Plain Dealer, which is obviously a misanthropic play. These critics have a problem separating the man from the work, a fairly common occurrence as students of Jonathan Swift can attest. Without confusing the man and his work, there is biographical evidence that can help to establish an author's attitude toward his creations. We have already concluded that the audience makeup did not make Wycherley write what he did. The evidence is too scanty for the leap required to show any cause and effect relationship here. Can we say that a theory of comedy existed that guided him and helped define the options available to him? Possibly at the time of his first play, but the rest are too uniquely his creations to have been written to formula. Can we look to Wycherley himself and see anything that would suggest he was interested in expressing a certain idea, interested in a certain theoretical stance--more instruction than entertainment--more libertine than satirist?

As to end and method, we have the testimony of Wycherley's contemporaries and his own poetic and dramatic practice. That he was an affable, civil, gentle man is beyond question. Lansdowne avoided the error that many modern day critics make when assessing the work of a satirist, failure to separate the man and the persona:

To judge by the Sharpness and Spirit of his Satyr,
 you might be led into another mistake, and imagine
 him an ill-natur'd Man: But what my Lord Rochester
 said of Lord Dorset, is as applicable to him--
The best good Man, with the worst natur'd Muse. .
 In his temper he was all the Softness of the
 tenderest Disposition; gentle and inoffensive to
 every Man in his particular character; he only
 attacks Vice as a public Enemy. . ."181

¹⁸¹Quoted in McCarthy, p. 98.

Major Pack seconded Lansdowne's description of Wycherley as a "certainly Good-Natured Man."¹⁸² Dennis reports that the Duke of Buckingham, when he believed Wycherley a rival for the affections of the Duchess of Cleveland, was prepared to ruin his reputation at court, but was so charmed with Wycherley that he "made a Friend of a Man who he believ'd his happy Rival."¹⁸³ Charles II, "a nice Discerner of men," according to Lansdowne, chose Wycherley as a companion, and visited him in his Bow Street lodging when he was ill in June of 1678. Later he offered him a sinecure as tutor to his seven year old son, the Duke of Richmond. It is unlikely that a surly misanthropic profligate would elicit this kind of response from his contemporaries.

That he had an interest in the ribald, the moralistic and the burlesque is evident from his entire literary career, from the burlesque *Hero and Leander* through his miscellaneous poems, his enjoyment of the stoical Seneca, Montaigne, the cynical LaRochefoucauld, and the moral philosopher Balthasar Gracian.¹⁸⁴ His enjoyment of Butler's *Hudibras* (1663) and his own attempt at a burlesque poem indicated his interest in the popular. To many

¹⁸²Quoted in McCarthy, p. 99.

¹⁸³John Dennis, "Letter to the Honourable Major Pack, September, 1720." *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, v. 2.ed. Edward Niles Hooker (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press), p. 410.

¹⁸⁴Joseph Spence, *Observations, Anecdotes, and Characters of Books and Men*, v. 1., ed. James M. Osborn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 37. #87.

it is evident that Wycherley was a moralist.¹⁸⁵ Eugene McCarthy, author of the most complete biography of Wycherley, quotes a passage from Wycherley's poetry that he believes "unironically and unequivocally as possible" illustrates Wycherley's moral stance:

Good-Nature is,
 . . . the best Sign of Human Prudence. . .
 The Sole-Proof of God's Image, on Mankind; . .
 From Brutishness, . . .
 To make Frail Man above all Self-Love Grow,
 And of a Man, become a God below.¹⁸⁶

While the claim here is a little too extreme, Wycherley's concern with the moral is evident throughout his poetry.

The problem of talking about Restoration satire is even further compounded by problems of definition. Like "wit", the word "satire" meant different things during the period in question. To some, satire was Juvenalian, to some Horatian, to others mock-heroic. Most generally, however, it was assumed that the satirist was to correct the vices and follies of the time, by giving rules for a virtuous and happy life.¹⁸⁷

Wycherley's contemporaries labelled him a satirist. After publication of *The Plain Dealer*, Dryden noted that Wycherley had obliged "all honest and virtuous men, by one of the most bold, most general, and

¹⁸⁵McCarthy, *William Wycherley: A Biography*, p. 61. See also Ross Schneider, Jr., *The Ethos of Restoration Comedy* (Urbana: University of Illinois); Zimbaro, *Wycherley's Drama: A Link in the Development of English Satire*.

¹⁸⁶McCarthy, *William Wycherley: A Biography*, p. 199.

¹⁸⁷See Sharrock, "Modes of Satire."

most useful satires, which has ever been presented on the English theatre."¹⁸⁸ John Evelyn remarked that "as long as Men are false and Women Vain/While Gold continues to be Virtues Bane,/In pointed Satyr Wycherley shall reign."¹⁸⁹ In verses prefixed to Congreve's *The Double Dealer*(1663), Dryden described Congreve as one in whom,

all the Beauties of the age we see:
Etherege his courtship, Southern's Purity,
The Satire, Wit and Strength of manly
Wycherley.¹⁹⁰

Congreve remarked the following year that,

Since the Plain Dealer's Scenes of Manly Rage,
Not one has dar'd to lash this crying age.¹⁹¹

Contemporary comment on Wycherley's practice, except for Evelyn's more general characterization, describes him as a satirist especially in relation to *The Plain Dealer*, a description echoed by most modern critics. But what of the other plays? Some modern critics go further than Wycherley's contemporaries and extend the appellation "satirist" to all of his work. Montague Summers, who sometimes errs in his zeal to champion (he calls Wycherley a "great satirist"), very accurately remarked that "we find

¹⁸⁸John Dryden, "The Author's Apology for Heroic Poetry and Poetic Licence," I, p. 199.

¹⁸⁹Quoted in Singh, p. 220.

¹⁹⁰Quoted in Singh, p. 195.

¹⁹¹William Congreve, Prologue to "Love for Love," *William Congreve Complete Plays*, ed. Alexander Charles Ewald (New York: Hill and Wang, 1956), pp. 196-97.

very different traits in [Wycherley's] life and work from the traits in the lives and works of Sedley, Etherege, or Buckingham. A keen sincerity informs every line, and this was recognized even by Jeremy Collier, who, when attacking the stage has singularly little to say against Wycherley."¹⁹²

For those who do not extend the mantle of the satirist to Wycherley because no "moral system" informs his works, or for those who "invent" a moral system to rescue Wycherley, Summers adds an obvious truth frequently forgotten: "A great satirist may be, not necessarily must be, a moralist." Wycherley's plays are about human actions that do raise moral issues. But Wycherley's plays were not created solely to express his particular moral point of view. As plays about life, about relationships, and the problems of relationships, about hypocrisy and the weakness of human nature, they raise the moral issues that the act of living raises for all of us.

Wycherley had, as Singh has demonstrated, "qualities that none perhaps amongst his contemporaries possessed -- strength, courage, incisiveness and greater dramatic skill."¹⁹³ After fashioning a name for himself with his first two comedies, Wycherley was unable and unwilling to continue playing the courtier. He had a foot in each of two worlds, and this becomes more and more evident in his plays after 1672. As a "wit" educated in the salon of Marquise Rambouillet during the interregnum, and as the classically educated son of a fiercely loyal member of the English

¹⁹²Montague Summers, *The Complete Works of William Wycherley*, v. 1, (Soho: Nonesuch Press, 1926), p. 62. See also Hume, *The Development of English Drama*, chp. 7.

¹⁹³Singh, *The Theory of Drama in the Restoration Period*, p. 216.

gentry, Wycherley typified the tensions of the age. He had two sides, "the brooding side that saw the value of the puritanical outlook,... and the side, .. dominated by his healthy, desiring body."¹⁹⁴ His plays attack false wit and inverted values while they demonstrate his affinity with the rakes and gallants who people them too. This tension, that of a libertine who saw ethical values in the world, or that of a moralist with a streak of the libertine, led Wycherley from his early, experimental and partly satirical drama to his two greatest plays, *The Country Wife* and *The Plain Dealer*. The two enigmatic plays have elicited critical responses that have the main characters, Horner and Manly, either representatives of the plays' moral standards or objects of ridicule. When Wycherley gave vent to his own vision and genius, his plays demonstrated his unique brand of strength, courage and dramatic skill. In fact, as Wycherley's drama, initially a blend of wit and judgment, of humours characters and witty characters, becomes more his own rather than the age's, it is characterized by a preponderance of judgment that makes clear the meaning of Rochester's words:

Of all our Modern Wits, none seems to me
 Once to have touch'd upon true comedy,
 But hasty Shadwell, and slow Wycherley.
 Shadwell's unfinish'd Works do yet impart
 Great Proofs of Natures Force, tho' none of Art;
 But Wycherley earns hard whate'er he gains,
 He wants no Judgment, and he spares no Pains.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴Bonamy Dobree, *Restoration Comedy, 1660-1720* (London: Oxford Press, 1946), p. 80.

¹⁹⁵John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, "An Allusion to Horace, The Tenth Satire of the First Book," *The Complete Poems of John Wilmot*, ed. David M. Vieth (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 126.

"Slow" here has nothing to do with Wycherley's rate of composition as McCarthy suggests.¹⁹⁶ Rochester is pointing to what Spingarn calls the antithesis of wit in the period; that is, judgment, the slower but more precise processes of the intellect.¹⁹⁷ Rather than the product of an audience demand or the literary trends of a period, Wycherley's four plays illustrate a neophyte's debt to his age, and the accomplished dramatist's debt to his own dramatic genius.

¹⁹⁶McCarthy, *William Wycherley: A Biography*, p. 99.

¹⁹⁷Spingarn, lviii.

CHAPTER II

"MUDDLED LOVE: *LOVE IN A WOOD, OR ST. JAMES PARK*"

Unlike *The Country Wife* and *The Plain Dealer*, William Wycherley's first play, *Love in a Wood, or St. James Park* (1671) is without a long history of critical controversy.¹ The majority of the commentary is modern, with critics generally falling into two categories: on the one hand there are denigrators of the play, like Righter,² Dobree³ and Craik,⁴ who find it "confusing," "tedious reading," and a "trifle." On the other, are those, like

¹Arthur Friedman, *The Plays of William Wycherley* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1979), xii-xvi. Initially there was some discussion concerning the plays composition, owing exclusively to a 63 year-old Wycherley telling the precocious Alexander Pope that the play was written when Wycherley was 17, or in 1660-61.

²Anne Righter, "William Wycherley," *Restoration Dramatists*, ed. Earl Miner (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1965), p. 72.

³Dobree, *Restoration Comedy, 1660-1720*, p. 81.

⁴T.W.Craik, "Some Aspects of Satire in Wycherley's Plays," *English Studies*, 41 (1960), p. 172.

Zimbardo⁵ and Rump,⁶ who find epic precedents and "interesting ambiguities." The paucity of discussion and the generalized statements (Fujimura finds it a "witty play") are owing to the fact that Wycherley's first comedy is neither his best, nor is it a work that is generally viewed as an important Restoration comedy. Even though the play is as engaging as neither *The Country Wife* nor *The Plain Dealer*, it is worth looking at both as a play that displays Wycherley's later brilliance in fully flowered but not fully controlled form, and as a good example of the transitional drama that preceded what we call Carolean comedy. It is also a play that demonstrates the influence that the Restoration theater world, its audience, actors and actresses and theatrical practices, had on Wycherley as he began his playwrighting career.

Putting the play into its historical context is admittedly problematic.⁷ The passage of three hundred years, the scanty records of

⁵Zimbardo, *Wycherley's Drama: A Link in the Development of English Satire*, p. 21.

⁶Eric S. Rump, "Theme and Structure in Wycherley's *Love in a Wood*," *English Studies*, 54 (1973), p. 333.

⁷See two selections from *The London Theatre World, 1660-1800*, ed. Robert D. Hume (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980). In "The Evidence From Promptbooks," Leo Hughes points out that promptbook evidence for staging practices are scanty at best until 1700 (p. 121). In "Performers and Performing," Philip H. Highfill, Jr., argues that we "do not have evidence in quantity sufficient to make confident generalizations about the lives or careers of the generality of common players before 1700" (p. 143). He adds that "perhaps we know enough about a great number of them . . . to counteract against the anecdotists who have left sensational and stereotypical impressions" (pp. 143-4).

acting practices, the difficulty in determining authorial intent, all these contribute to make the task a formidable one. But it is an effort that is necessary and rewarding to readers of Wycherley and other Restoration dramatists. Unlike other periods, the Restoration theatrical world was without a known theatrical tradition. It is, as one theater historian has said, "a lost art form;" it was drama as a "self-conscious form in which a play's style was determined by its own laws of performance." It was a time when the theatrical illusion was frequently shattered, by actors going in and out of character, by an audience as interested in itself as in the play, by a text that was "a framework and not a formula for performance."⁸ It is a commonplace that few plays are actually produced as they have come from the playwright, and in the Restoration we have Dryden's *Don Sebastian* (1689) changed by Betterton in performance, and Aphra Behn's *The Dutch Lover* (1672), altered by Edward Angel, to name just two. As Montague Summers noted long ago, all of this makes it difficult for contemporary readers to recapture what made these successful plays in their day.⁹

This line of inquiry is made more reasonable by the Restoration reality of playwrights in close contact with a small group of actors, and an audience familiar with actors typically identified for a particular role both in comedy and tragedy. The dramatic tradition, the stereotypical plots and situations, the two acting companies with their small stables of actors and

⁸See J.L. Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 1-7.

⁹Montague Summers, *The Restoration Theatre*, xv.

actresses, and a repertory theater made surprise and novelty difficult. The audience's expectations were even somewhat fixed by the fact that "every significant actor in the Restoration had some clearly defined type of role in comedy and another in tragedy at some stage."¹⁰

Analysis will show that *Love in a Wood* is an entertaining comedy about muddled love, seen through a variety of love relationships, all variously motivated. Most important for our purposes, this analysis will show the extent to which the experience of the play can be helped by remembering that we are reacting to work originally intended for the Restoration stage. As Restoration drama, it is subject to its own peculiar requirements for acting, costuming, music and audience appreciation. When viewed through the lens of the Restoration, it is clear that *Love in a Wood* is neither complex nor a trifle.

I

Audience and Practice

The formal elements of *Love in A Wood* strongly suggest that Wycherley was conscious of the evolving and lively Restoration theatrical world, its audience and its ideas.¹¹ Additionally, Wycherley knew that his

¹⁰Peter Holland, *The Ornament of Action* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 81.

¹¹See Joseph Wood Krutch, *Comedy and Conscience After the Restoration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1924). Chapter Three, "Critic and Amatuer," is a discussion of the "importance of literary criticism, both formal and informal, and of [the] general public interest in authors and authorship." Collin Visser, "Scenery and Technical Design," *The*

first play would have to please an audience that was just beginning to become a little varied in composition and tastes. In 1671, a majority of the audience was made up of an influential court and aristocratic segment, though the town and city elements were also represented. Wycherley was also probably aware that Beaumont and Fletcher, and Jonson were still popular on the English stage¹² and aware of the Dryden-Shadwell debate on the old versus the new. He had the example of Etherege's *The Comical Revenge*, or *Love in a Tub* (1664) and Sedley's *The Mulberry Garden* (1668), and Calderon too.

While *Love in a Wood* has Jonsonian elements, it is doubtful that William Wycherley consciously set out to do something solely Jonsonian. While admitting that he risks oversimplifying, Chadwick makes a point about the variegated drama of the time: "majority opinion during the Restoration seems to have been . . . that mixing of modes was not entirely respectable. . . yet public taste demanded it."¹³ Dryden remarked that the variety he practiced in his own plays was a result of the English love of variety: "We love variety more than any other Nation; and so long as the audience will not be pleas'd without it, the Poet is obliged to humour

London Theatre World, ed. Hume, argues that "although plays might ostensibly conform to some critical precept . . . in fact, they more often imitated the latest success at the rival playhouse"(p. 66).

¹²John Harold Wilson, *The Influence of Beaumont and Fletcher on the Restoration Stage* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1928), pp. 135-66. Wilson lists Restoration revivals of Beaumont and Fletcher and Jonson.

¹³Chadwick, *The Four Plays of William Wycherley*, pp. 17-8.

them".¹⁴ Wycherley seemed to agree because his first play is the combination of proven practices that a first time playwright might think logical ingredients in the recipe for a successful play.

If *Love in a Wood* was probably written or revised in 1670,¹⁵ it was at a time when the serious rhymed heroic play, which had never really established itself, was peaking in popularity,¹⁶ and when the course of comedy was being charted by a variety of play types. The lengthy preface to Edward Howard's *Woman's Conquest*, acted in November of 1670, was an attempt to redirect the course that comedy stood prepared to take. To Howard's mind, the role of the comic playwright was to create exemplary characters, utilize general rather than personal satire, and to develop characters beyond the two dimensional levels of those humours characters of Jonson, re-popularized by Shadwell. Thus in sharp contrast to the farcical adaptations of Moliere, the humours plays of Shadwell and the plotless wit and sex comedies like *She would if she could*, Howard was suggesting that the chief end of comedy is instruction and that what passed for comedy in his day was too farcical. What was required, therefore, was a mixture of

¹⁴Dryden, "The Epistle Dedicatory to Love Triumphant."

¹⁵For a discussion of the composition of *Love in a Wood*, see Friedman, xiii.

¹⁶Hume, *The Development of Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century*, p. 269. *The Conquest of Granada* was staged in 1670 and the heroic play was popular enough to result in Buckingham's *The Rehearsal* by 1672.

the heroic with humours and mirth. Low comedy had to be replaced by something more akin to the heroic,¹⁷ something with a purpose.

Additionally, the theatrical world of 1670-71 continued to witness the staying power of Beaumont and Fletcher, writers of gay, sophisticated plays that appealed to the Restoration's desire for refinement. The plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, along with those of Ben Jonson and Shakespeare, accounted for a significant part of the repertory of the two licensed theaters. Until 1680, "two of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays were acted to every one of Shakespeare's. Of the seventy-two plays performed by the King's Company during the period between 1660-1662, twenty-six derive from Beaumont and Fletcher's canon."¹⁸

Wycherley, however, was also probably aware of the newly developing comic tradition. Gaining acceptance were mixed plotted plays by writers like Sir George Etherege, whose *The Comical Revenge, or Love in a Tub* (1664), included a skillful blend of four of the distinguishable modes of the day: the love and honor plot similar to those in the Spanish mode, the wit plot, the gulling plot, and the low or farcical plot. That the public was smitten by this new style drama is evidenced by the response to *Love in a Tub*, which "got the company more Reputation and profit then any

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 275.

¹⁸William W. Appleton, *Beaumont and Fletcher, A Critical Study* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1956), p. 100.

preceding Comedy."¹⁹ Four years later, *She Would if she Could* (1668), also with a mixed plot, was described by Shadwell as "the best Comedy that has been written since the Restauration of the Stage."²⁰ Sir Charles Sedley's, *Mulberry Garden* (1668), with a romantic-heroic plot in couplets and a wit plot in prose, suggested that the audience was ready for, and even expecting, the mixing of modes that heretofore remained separate.

While it is virtually impossible to trace a direct line of influence from Beaumont and Fletcher to Davenant to Etherege to Wycherley, it has been convincingly established that the vigorous theater following the Restoration was greatly influenced by the popularity of Beaumont and Fletcher and the reliance of the companies of Killegrew and Davenant on Caroline drama into the 1670's when Restoration or Carolean drama was established in its own right.

The point that requires emphasis, and it is a point convincingly established by Robert Hume, is that by 1670-71, popular trends in comedy---the mixing of modes established by Beaumont and Fletcher, and the humours plots and characters of Jonson, were giving way to new theories and practices involving a witty couple and the application of characteristics

¹⁹John Downes, *Roscius Anglicanus, or an Historical Review of the Stage in the English Stage: Attack and Defense, 1557-1730*, ed. Arthur Freeman (New York: Garland Publishing, 1974), p. 28.

²⁰Thomas Shadwell, "Preface to *The Humorist*, *The Complete Works of Thomas Shadwell*, ed. Montague Summers, (London: The Fortune Press, 1927), p. 188.

of the rhymed heroic drama.²¹ The low comedy inspired by Jonson was under attack by Dryden and Shadwell, who, though they disagreed on many things, were finally of the same mind in advocating a comic drama more akin to the heroic.²² As contemporary practice suggests, the time was ripe for experimenters interested in attempting to create a comedy that would blend the best of all the structural possibilities and actual practices.

Anyone familiar with Restoration comedy is aware that many of the period's plays are formulaic to such an extent that they blur one into the other. The characters are stereotypical, the plots predictable. The predictability is pervasive enough to argue in favor of a theater unusually influenced by the abilities of a small stable of actors, the predictable tastes of a small homogeneous theater audience, a strong tradition, or to a host of unimaginative playwrights. But these are points that our entire discussion will address.

For the moment suffice it to say that Wycherley's first play is more that of the age than it is his own. Hoping to please, and searching for his own voice, Wycherley did not seek to imitate a single dramatist. He tried his hand at what Etherege had already done and Sedley too. He imitated what he thought would prove successful with his predominantly courtly audience. In his first play, Wycherley gives us three plots, a mixture

²¹Hume, *The Development of Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century*, chapter 7, "Sex, Horror, Farce, and the Heroic Inclination in the Seventies," pp. 269-280.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 277.

of wit, farce, and romantic love; and a variety of characters, witty, humours, and satiric, including creations like Gripe and Lady Flippant that stand out as memorable among the many hundreds of comic characters of the time.

II

Performance and the Play

Because the stage comedy of the period is so formulaic we can reasonably draw the conclusion that J.L. Styan has drawn: "it is not that we should look to the plotting and the characterization of the plays only for the answers to our questions, but that we should study what made such repetition unimportant"²³ to the success of the plays. And that is where performance, Restoration performance practices come into play. We must remember that Wycherley's is a drama for a small theater, artificially acted, generally involving characters that were stereotypical. The audience was known to be rowdy and critical, and sometimes unattentive to disrupting. The audience knew what to expect, and the theater companies knew what it expected. The challenge for the Restoration actor was obvious. Every extra-textual device possible, including conventions like the aside, breeches parts, discovery scenes, particularly in a woman's chamber, was used to keep the audience involved. And while it is true that Wycherley at times played to the base prejudices of his audience, and that his work is without ethical didacticism, it is also true that he did ridicule what his cold analytical eye saw was wrong with his times.

The experience of *Love in a Wood* does not, therefore, raise questions about three plotted plays or the debt owed to the classical satire's

²³Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance*, p. 1.

praise/blame format. It is rather a richly experienced series of comically confused love relationships involving an equally diverse and comic group of lovers and pretenders to love. The comic joining of stereotypical characters like the puritanical and miserly Alderman Gripe, the parodying of the popular heroic drama, the double entendre and wit comedy that make this play in many ways typical of the times were all guaranteed to interest an audience dominated by a courtly and aristocratic crowd.

Like all of Wycherley's plays the opening scene in *Love in a Wood* is great theater. The play opens with a lively scene, featuring a great comic character, Lady Flippant, played by a popular actress, Mrs. Knepp. The scene was designed to engage and quiet the crowd as much as introduce the "low plot"²⁴ involving Flippant-Joyner-Gripe-Sir Simon, and the overall theme of muddled love. The opening exchange, probably addressed directly to the audience as Mrs. Knepp paced the forestage jutting out into the pit, between Lady Flippant, the impoverished widow, and Mrs. Joyner is nothing short of comic self-indictment. Almost immediately we encounter the first type of love, a love that is bargained and paid for, one that is motivated by false personal and social needs, one that has supplanted real personal and social needs of fulfillment and companionship with the desire for station and sexual gratification. We find that Lady Flippant wants a husband, and not because she seeks life long companionship and a complement to herself. For her, and for other of her contemporaries, marriage was made for

²⁴Because so much previous discussion makes use of the designations "low," "wit" and "high" to identify the three strands of action in *Love in a Wood*, I have adopted them also.

convenience, it was a commodity, something for which one bartered. And bartering she has been. Unfortunately, and ironically, she does not seem to realize that she has little to barter with for she appears to one of her suitors as one that is "bow-legg'd, hopper-hipp'd," "betwixt Pomatum and Spanish Red," with "a Complexion like a Holland cheese, and no more Teeth left"(II,i,155-54). All the while desirous of a husband, "Tis well known no Woman breathing could use more Industry to get her a Husband than I have"(I,ii,15-6), she declaims against the species believing railing against marriage is "the Widows way to it certainly." Lacking most of the attributes deemed necessary by the world for a good match, the Lady Flippant must utilize the services of Mrs. Joyner to procure a partner. At this point we know that she has a potential husband in either Dapperwit or Sir Simon Addleplot. By the end of the first scene it is evident that in this world of muddled love some love has to be helped along.

In the course of the play we see that Lady Flippant is attempting to hide an insatiable sexual appetite behind a feigned virtuousness and dislike of the opposite sex and the institution of marriage. Flippant's hypocrisy is repeatedly and comically exposed and her venal, sexual nature revealed. She chases the two fools of the play, Dapperwit and Sir Simon, and at one point even confesses to having sexual relations with her coachman. She is the comic embodiment of the one who values the material and physical over the right and moral, as the one who, like the hypocritical Lady Fidget in *The Country Wife*, another role played by Mary Knepp, is the dissociation of language and action. Lady Flippant, while comically entertaining, is unmistakably the object of Wycherley's satiric attack.

What is Wycherley's attitude toward his other creations? And how do we know? Alderman Gripe, clearly something other than the front he shows his world, would have the world believe that he is an "implacable majestrate" when he really practices something far from the Puritan piety that he professes. Wycherley surely knew that the predominantly aristocratic audience would have enjoyed the satire directed at a hypocritical puritan like Gripe. And John Lacy who acted the part was just the man to make sure that they enjoyed it. According to Langbaine, Lacy, well known in his day for such Jonsonian parts as Sir Politic-Would-Be, was "a comedian whose abilities in Action were sufficiently known to all that frequented the King's theatre." He added that Lacy performed "all parts that he undertook to a miracle: insomuch that I am apt to believe that this Age never had, so the next never will have, his Equal, at least not his superior."²⁵

Flippant's introductory description of her brother (Wycherley likes to comment on his players before they enter the stage) as a censorious fop who knows nothing is confirmed in ensuing exchange between Joyner and Gripe, each attempting to out compliment the other. The exchange almost ends with John Lacy, who played Gripe, farcically stopping Joyner by putting a handkerchief to her mouth, and is finally stopped by Sir Simon's announcement that the "half Pullet will be cold." The fact is that Gripe is more like his sister than he will allow even himself to know. His values are

²⁵Gerard Langbaine, *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets* (1691), ed. Arthur Freeman (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1973), pp. 317.

best summarized by his remark that he loves his daughter, his reputation and his money, though "the last is the dearest to me" (V,ii,50-1). We discover that his interest in the nubile and seemingly innocent Lucy is solely the result of a libido suppressed for the sake of public piety, and not the christian charity that he speaks to Joyner about. Beneath a facade of morality is a venality and lust presented in typical Wycherley fashion. The character is engaging enough to laugh at, the ridicule general enough to lash the vice.

Mrs. Joyner, the opportunist of the play is a forerunner to Horner. Katherine Cory, referred to as Dol Common by Pepys, was a big woman, well known for playing old women, scolding wives, governesses and bawds, and generally acknowledged by her contemporaries as an excellent comedienne of low comedy.²⁶ It may even have been her success here that motivated Wycherley to write the memorable part of Widow Blackacre in *The Plain Dealer* for her. In any case the world Mrs. Joyner inhabits has established a need for her services. It is not she alone who reduces love and human relationships to dollar and cents transactions; it is the people who solicit her services who do. She is a bawd, and flatterer and cheat to be sure, but she does only what she is asked. We marvel at her ability to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the hypocrisy and weaknesses of those around her.

²⁶For an account of Katherine Cory's abilities as mimic see Pepys's account of her imprisonment following her acting Sempronia to the ridicule of Lady Hervey. See also the account of Mrs. Cory in John Harold Wilson's *All the King's Ladies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 132-4.

I can not imagine a Restoration audience believing that it had met anyone to this point who is a positive model. In addition to the use of diction, rhythm, and costuming to establish how these characters were to be viewed by the audience, the standard that we apply to Lady Flippant, Mrs. Joyner, Alderman Gripe and others in the low plot is clearly established by the world of the play. The gulf between what they claim for values and what governs their actions is huge. Affectation and hypocrisy under the guise of naturalness and virtue are ridiculous. Self-deception, on the other hand, the kind that destroys the self and harms those it touches, is the object of repulsion. In *Love in a Wood*, those that attempt to deceive others usually fail and end up hurting only themselves. The standard here, as always in Wycherley, is not a complex system that establishes absolute standards of moral good. As a critic of Swift has noted, "the power of persuasion and delight depends, far more often than not, upon values which are readily intelligible and acceptable--and even more commonly, upon values which, since they are held by the majority of men, do not require overt statement."²⁷ While I am not claiming that Wycherley executes his satire in the same specific way that Swift does, I do believe that both are concerned with the obvious moral problems that people confront daily and that in the aggregate affect the society that exists to support them. Here Wycherley is particularly concerned with them as they relate to the natural desire for a mate and the various motivations that push this impulse.

²⁷Edward W. Rosenhiem, Jr., *Swift and the Satirist's Art*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 223.

The variety that the English audience of 1671 so loved came their way with the introduction in Scene II of what is commonly called the "wit plot"--scenes of the coffee house crowd and of wits and pretenders to wit. The wit plot predictably involved the relationship of the gallants and their ladies, in this case Ranger and Vincent, and that of Ranger and Lydia, and the antics of the play's would-be wit, Dapperwit. Ranger, the more conventional true wit, chases, drinks and games in the park, while remaining in what can be termed the wit plot. Ranger, apparently in some way seriously committed to Lydia, pursues Christina of the "high plot," while Lydia attempts to bring his ranging under control. Wycherley's attitude toward Ranger and Vincent, and Dapperwit, when he is a wit, is best described by a remark he made in a letter to John Dennis: "I am in love with a Town Wits Conversation, though it be but at a Distance that I am forced to enjoy it, and tho it abuses me while I enjoy it."²⁸ In a way this is a good statement of Wycherley's practice. Surely he loved the wit way, and surely his audience would have identified with the actors, their dress, antics, props and raillery in this plot line. It is also noteworthy that Hart played Ranger and Horner, both wit characters who enjoy the chase though they use different sets of rules.

To this point it is clear that Wycherely is simply sharing comic character types, and utilizing the acting skills of such actors as John Lacy and Katherine Cory to make those types come alive for an audience with

²⁸William Wycherley, "Mr. Wycherley's Answer to Mr. Dennis, 2/14/1663-64," *The Complete Works of William Wycherley*, vol. 2, ed. Montague Summers, (Soho: The Nonesuch Press, 1924), p. 200.

known expectations. But these are the more obvious instances of the way that historical data makes clear Wycherley's satiric intent. But an understanding of the theatrical milieu circa 1671 can go further than establish more of the same in the wit and humours plot lines. It can help resolve some critical controversies like that which asks whether Wycherley's characters are inconsistently or complexly drawn. The distinction is important because the former could suggest a weakness typical of first time writers and the latter an early indication of genius and innovation or a Restoration convention that did not create problems for the Restoration playgoer.

The mixing of plots obviously necessitated the intermingling of characters. In an attempt at control Wycherley wisely limited the number of characters that must act in more than one plot. And while the various plot lines are nicely joined, it is this mingling that introduces what to some is a problem with the play's "inconsistency". By labeling the shifts in character "inconsistencies" critics have suggested that Wycherley did not achieve his goal of a consistent type. But the question that this discussion raises is really more broad. Is Wycherley really inconsistent? Or are the characters multifaceted? Are we witnessing one of the structural conventions of Restoration comedy--that is, characters that are consistent? Have we uncovered a problem in the text that would have been solved by the Restoration actor playing to the author's intent and the audience's expectation. Does what we know about the Restoration theater world help us decide in favor of "inconsistency" or "complexity" or "convention"?

It is true, for example, that Dapperwit acts in one scene in a way that is distinctly different from his actions and words in another. In one scene he is witty and in another witless. In the experience of the play some of Wycherley's characters act in a way dictated by those who surround them and the situation they find themselves in. The characters could, therefore, rightly be termed inconsistent only if we insist that they act the same way all the time. It is doubtful that a Restoration audience used to dominant character types would insist on absolutely consistent characters. And equally important is the fact that Restoration performance was artificial enough that the requirement of consistency for lifelike performance would not have been a meaningful criterion for determining dramatic success in an unrealistic theater.²⁹

This notion of inconsistency also crops up in discussions of the "high plot." While Ranger is acceptable as a character in the wit plot, some, like Fujimura, have noted, that "Ranger is deficient in judgment and made to appear ridiculous in his pursuit of Christina"³⁰ in the more romantic high plot. Fujimura would have a character more heroic in his pursuit of the high plot's heroine because that seems appropriate. But Ranger acts as he does out of necessity. His entrance into the high plot is intended to lend

²⁹See Farquhar's *Discourse*: "I may travel from Constantinople to Denmark, so to France, and home to England, and rest long enough in each country besides. But you'll say: How can you carry us with you? Very easily, sir, if you are willing to go."

³⁰Thomas H. Fujimura, *The Restoration Comedy of Wit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 129.

a comic touch to the Christina-Valentine match, a touch which reinforces the mistaken identity and lover-behind-the-tapestry comic devices that interrupt Christina's attempt to get reacquainted with her lover. These typically Restoration discovery devices reinforce the parody of the heroic intended in this plot line. The adjective "high" is probably a bad choice to describe the action here. It is true that the love depicted is different in kind from the "love" relationships in the Flippant-Gripe-Joyner-Dapperwit plot in that it is less farcical; but it is made comic nonetheless, even if unintentionally so, by the juxtaposition of situations, by the repeated use of standard comic devices, by the interaction of contrasting character types that is required to move the action along, all of which will be discussed further. Furthermore, when we consider that Mrs Boutell, remembered in her day for her beauty, her popularity, her promiscuity and her breeches parts, acted Christina, it is easy to conclude that it is Fujimura who has missed the comedy in this plot line.

In similiar fashion, Vincent, who acts a part with Ranger and Dapperwit in the wit plot, is given the role of confidant to Valentine in the high plot. While the introduction of Vincent provides the connection from plot to plot that is necessary for staging and makes the variety of the play seem coherently joined, it has prompted some readers to find the relationships improbable. But it is doubtful that Wycherley's audience reacted this way. It has been persuasively argued that "the conscious element of play acting, the grand entrances, the elaborate costuming, the artificial expression, the predictable formulaic plots, all eliminated any sense that what was on stage was intended as a realistic picture of human

behavior."³¹ In Restoration production, therefore, the comic tone is what dominates. The Restoration audience would not see any requirement for consistency in behavior from comic scene to comic scene, or from plot line to plot line. Consistency came with the stereotypical roles each character was assigned that were generally reinforced by the reputation each actor had for performing in such roles. If even a foolish character exhibits some perspicacity for the sake of a joke, or for the sake of Wycherley's emphasis, it was easy enough for the audience to accept him once back in his more stereotypical place. Likewise there was no need for probability in plotting; everyone would know how the boy gets girl, or how the cuckolding story lines would end. If we accept the characters in their assigned roles as representatives of a type, the minor deviations are not enough to confuse us about what they represent in the created world of the play. The point of a scene, the exposure of a fool or folly, dominates any of the slight differences in characterization.

The relationship between Lydia and Flippant illustrates the effect the deviation has on the comedy. Lydia and Flippant have been friendly, and even though Lydia has more wit than Flippant, she has always maintained a decorous civility in their discourse. Displays of rudeness would be inconsistent with what we already know about her character. In Act II, when Lydia and Flippant are in St. James Park, Flippant invites Lydia to leave with her before they are put upon by some men:

³¹Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance*, p. 212.

Lydia: "No, you must not leave me.

Flippant: Then you must leave them.

Lydia: I'll see if they are worse company than you first."

Flippant: Monstrous impudence....

This is not a remark we would have expected from Lydia, yet it is all the more biting for being unexpected. This is a characteristic of Wycherley's work that has caused problems for those who try to classify Horner, the "hero" or "villain," take your pick, of *The Country Wife*. When all that he says and does is scrutinized, he defies simple classification. The result, as I have noted, is more surprise, and therefore more comedy. Whether or not we find this acceptable, and not whether it occurs, is really all that is at issue.

While it is true that we have characters who reveal new and at times unexpected dimensions in two different plots, we also have those that seem "inconsistent" in the course of a single scene or act. Take Dapperwit for instance. Dapperwit is most often intended to be an object of ridicule and the occasion for Wycherley, as was his tendency, to run a joke to its limits. The *Dramatis Personae* describes Dapperwit as "a brisk, conceited, half-witted fellow of the Town." The part was acted by Michael Mohun who later acted the misunderstood comic role of Mr. Pinchwife, a character that contributes importantly to the comic tone of *The Country Wife*. But like Paris in *The Gentleman Dancing Master*, we have a character who speaks true and false wit, whatever the dramatic situation requires. If a spokesman for Wycherley's point of view is required and there is no one else on stage with the opportunity, then Dapperwit will suffice.

That Dapperwit is primarily foolish is a point made repeatedly by the text. At the point where Dapperwit is to leave with Martha to find a parson to wed them, for instance, he pauses to form a simile, demonstrating to Martha that he is more in love with what he mistakes for wit than with her. There are even scenes, like Dapperwit's self-indicting exchange with Lydia on the subject of wit, that give Wycherley an opportunity to display his own wit. Dapperwit dramatizes Wycherley's belief that "There is nothing more ridiculous in any Man. . .than to talk of his own Performances, or of Himself. . ." ³² and that "Modesty is the best Proof and Aid of True Wit." ³³ When we visualize Dapperwit dressed in foppish splendor, it is his witlessness that dominates our impression of him.

But then we encounter scenes where Dapperwit assumes the role of true wit. In Act I, scene ii, for example, Flippant enters the coffee house with Sir Simon, a "Coxcomb, always in pursuit of Women of great Fortunes." Upon meeting Dapperwit she is quick to mention that she hopes he will not censure her for passing the evening with a fool, "...he is not a man to be jealous of sure," she adds. Dapperwit's witty response is that Flippant is "not a Lady to be jealous of sure." This is the kind of response generally reserved for the true wits of the genre. But Wycherley has Dapperwit on stage when the right occasion for a good comic scene developed, and he took

³²William Wycherley, "The Preface to My Critics ante manum, Who were my Criticks, before they were my Readers," *The Complete Works*, vol. 2, p. 5.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 7.

advantage of it. The comedy of the exchange is highlighted by a "lady" being bested by someone not universally regarded for his wit. Actually Dapperwit's wit is "true" when he is not working to impress others with the verbal superfluities that he mistakes for true wit, that is when he is expressing an opinion held by most of the inhabitants of his world.

This so-called "confusion" in character, the result of requiring a character to do dramatic double duty, is not limited to Vincent, Lydia, and Dapperwit, and not limited to *Love in a Wood*. Throughout the Wycherley canon, there is no priority placed on maintaining a consistency of character either with one dimensional fools or wits or even the lead characters that appear to become increasingly more complex in the later plays. In his early work, where he is more imitative, Wycherley is a writer of comic scenes. The audience did not have any expectation for reformation in the wits or fools that populate the plays. Likewise, the characters in the "high plot" are nothing more than abstractions. The practice of Wycherley here, and elsewhere, requires that we accept Vincent as a wit sitting in the coffee house with Ranger and as a heroic confidant to Valentine.³⁴ The same logic requires that we accept Dapperwit as wit in those situations where he acts wittily, though the majority of scenes in which he appears he appears as a would-be wit.

As we will see in *The Gentleman Dancing Master* and *The Country Wife*, most of Wycherley's characters have the opportunity to act the part of

³⁴Zimbaro, *Wycherley's Drama: A Link in the Development of English Satire*, pp. 38-39.

spokesman for the standard of good and acceptable behavior in any given scene. The overall effect of the play, however, and an overwhelming number of the individual scenes, is that the characters act in line with their descriptions provided in the *dramatis personae*. The point that Fujimura and others make is correct--the characters do act differently from one scene to another. But this has nothing to do with inconsistency where that means lack of control. Wycherley chose not to have his characters act one dimensionally, to have all his characters be fools all of the time, and in the process lose the opportunities for satire and additional comic scenes. As a wit himself, Wycherley took advantage of the opportunities to display his wit, and an artificial and arbitrary, non-theatrical standard for consistency would not stop him.

The ambiguity that results from the disparity between what a modern reader expects and what we get from Wycherley's characters exists throughout the Wycherley canon. In the hands of able Restoration actors, however, the issues seem less important if even noticeable at all. An inconsistency was not likely to shatter the stage illusion because the audience was so used to the formula; any minor deviation was not likely to affect the audience's assessment of the thematic use it was to put each character. It is an interesting notion of character that allows for alternating spokesmen for the "right way", to borrow a phrase from Norman Holland.³⁵ The result of the shifting spokesman approach to

³⁵Norman Holland, *The First Modern Comedies* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959).

Wycherley is that there is greater unpredictability, and therefore a greater level of interest from the Restoration theater-goer. Even though most of the characters are types, the interest in the play and the characters will ultimately follow from the quality of the acting. How complex the characters seem will be passed on by an individual actor's ability.

By the end of the first act, it is clear that Wycherley has provided a comic cast of character types that represent a cross section of society. We also have a variety of love interests, Flippant-Dapperwit-Sir Simon, Lydia-Ranger, Gripe-Lucy, Dapperwit-Sir Simon-Martha, all in one way or another muddled by intrigue, dissembling, and hypocrisy.

Act II raises another issue that information about Wycherley's theatrical milieu helps to clarify. The question is whether the so-called high plot is in the serious traditional mixed mode method or a parody. This romantic-heroic plot that Wycherley tries to weave into the fabric of the play, not in verse as had been the fashion, details the constancy of Christina who overcomes the blinding and at times dramatically forced jealousy of Valentine, who was earlier forced to flee the country for wounding a man in defense of his love's honor. It has some of what Hume calls Etheregian refinements but is for the most part "no drawing room comedy."³⁶

The question to ask here is how are we to understand this level of the action? Some suggest that contemporary audiences would have viewed

³⁶Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century*, p. 278.

Christina as a parody of the platonic lover that frequently graced the stage in the period's heroic plays.³⁷ Others find it a serious plot line that offers a desirable love relationship to contrast with that of Ranger and Lydia. Wycherley could hardly have intended that the audience view the characters in this plot line seriously. It hardly needs to be established that we are to see the Christina-Valentine love story in contrast to Lydia-Ranger, the constant lovers versus the inconstant and his mate. But the fact that Mrs. Boutell acted the part of Christina suggests an interesting possibility that can remain only conjecture. Mrs. Boutell was talented, popular and beautiful, a "very considerable Actress, ...low of Stature, had very agreeable Features, a good Complexion, but a Childish look. Her voice was weak, tho' mellow; she generally acted the young, innocent Lady whom all the Heroes are mad in Love with; she was a Favorite of the Town."³⁸ A list of the dramatic roles she played during her career suggests that she was to become very popular in breeches parts, including two in plays by Wycherley, *The*

³⁷Summers describes Mrs. Boutell, who acted the part of Christina, as follows: "Amongst her many roles in comedy, a province in which the critics voted her superb, were Estifania in *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*. . .Mrs Pinchwife, *The Country Wife*; Fidelity, *The Plain Dealer*; and above all Melantha in *Marriage a-la Mode*....In tragedy, Mrs. Boutell was, if possible, even more admired than in her lighter scenes. Her Aspatia in *The Maid's Tragedy* was deemed incomparable, a picture of perfect pathos and sweet sincerity," p. 28-9. See also Chadwick who finds comedy in the high plot claiming that when the importunate rake Ranger confronts Christina "heroic love [is] delightfully sucked into the comic vortex." Cynthia Matlock sees parody of the heroic in the high plot. She argues convincingly that Ranger courts Christina with "a précieux style of address which he self-consciously mimics for her benefit."

³⁸See Wilson, *All the King's Ladies*, for a list of her breeches parts, pp. 120-22.

Country Wife (Margery Pinchwife) and *The Plain Dealer* (Fidelia). It is interesting to speculate that Wycherley used an actress known both for acting serious roles and for her experience in comedy to parody the heroic drama of his day.

Not only do the parts of Christina and Valentine suggest a parody, but so does the stage business. Our introduction to Christina is via an exchange that is strange for a romantic heroine. Isabel, her maid, opens the scene by addressing her mistress in a manner generally more appropriate for reversed roles. The dialogue that follows from her opening line, "For Heavens sake undress your self, Madam," introduces the comic nature of her role and introduces the conflict that develops in the later scenes of the play. The comedy is apparent in the depiction of a woman so lost in her ideal love that she needs instruction from her maid. Additionally, Christina's own inflated pronouncements are continually undercut by the comic situations and characters that dominate the action of this plot. The effect that this farce has on our perception of the high plot is clearly evident in Act II, i, when Christina has gone on at some length to her servant about Valentine: "Unhappy Valentine, cou'dst thou but see how soon thy absence, and mis-fortunes have disbanded all thy Friends, and turn'd thy Slaves all Renegades, thou sure wou'dst prize my only faithful heart." Just as she finishes this romantic profession of her constancy, imagine the shout, "Hail Faithful Shepherdess," and then the stage entrance of Lady Flippant, the play's nymphomaniac. This is in keeping with the farcical humor like that in Act IV, iii, that has an enraged Valentine drawing his sword from

behind the door only to be shoved back in by Vincent who does not want him to be discovered.

The language of the high plot is unmistakably more elevated and serious, and decidedly different in tone, from that of the other plot lines. Even the characters know that they are mixing with a different element. Vincent for one makes the distinction for Ranger that Wycherley intended for his reader. In IV, iii, Vincent twice describes Christina as a woman of honor, and again in Act V as a "person of honor." This is not to say that this plot line is for parody's sake only and is not in some connected to the dynamics of *Love in a Wood*. As Eric Rump has correctly noted, the "kind of relationship that Wycherley is *attempting* to depict here is clearly supposed to be different in quality from the other relationships in the play. In spite of being comic, it is intense, romantic and as far as Christina is concerned, involves both trust and self-sacrifice."³⁹ This is the impression that the play creates regardless of whether the Christina-Valentine action is described as heroic, comic or quasi-serious.

Moreover, when the Christina-Valentine relationship is contrasted with the others, it is evident that it is eventually built on idealized notions of trust and love. The fact that it suffers through some mistaken identity, misunderstood situations and comic dialogue testifies that the action should not be accepted as a paradigm of successful love. What is wrong with this model of love is that it is as muddled as the others, confused by jealousy

³⁹Rump, "Theme and Structure in Wycherley's *Love in a Wood*," p. 329.

and mistrust. As a type, Christina is the embodiment of a love that is more than physically or materially motivated, but remains a confused, illusory idea of love that the world will not permit.

By the end of Act II, ii, Ranger's chance meeting with Christina has helped muddle the Ranger-Lydia relationship even more. Scenes iii and iv, are scenes of exposition. Wycherley has to get everyone to Vincent's to stay connected to the Christina story line and coincidentally this is where we will find Valentine. There are continued suggestions as to how the heroic plot is to be read. In scene iv, for example, immediately after Vincent has described Christina's period of mourning for Valentine, Ranger walks in and makes the foregoing discussion appear burlesque. This echoes the earlier scene when the seriousness of Christina was undercut by Lady Flippant's entrance and silly salutation. As soon as the audience sees Ranger they know what to expect--more confusion, more mistrust, more mistaken identity and more false motivation--all the stuff of comedy. It is equally probable that Wycherley thought he could use the high plot to vary the love relationship depicted, but it is difficult to treat anything seriously that is surrounded by so much farce.

The problems that many critics have with *Love in a Wood* are tied to the heroic plot line. As a hybrid it is difficult to establish consistent criteria for evaluating a play with such different dramatic strands. Wycherley wanted variety in situation and character, and he does an admirable job of linking plots and moving action along with a series of comic ironies. Fortunately, Wycherley gave up on heroic/romantic plots like this one. Even though he exhibits some skill in handling it (see IV, iii, in

particular), his first attempt was apparently enough to convince him that his skill was more in drawing characters like those that people his wit and humours plots.

The humours and wit plot lines in Act II, continue the predictable satiric jabs at passersby and the social scene, all to the end of revealing the hypocrisy of Lady Flippant, the foolishness of Sir Simon, and the false wit of Dapperwit. Again the dynamics of production overpower the elements that seem troublesome to those who demand verisimilitude in reading. It is true that we encounter situations, for instance, that require Lydia, a witty woman, and Flippant, a foolish woman, to be friends. And even more improbable is the plot line that requires Christina, a woman of "heroic" values that necessitate her living as a recluse for love, to have a passing acquaintance with a woman like Flippant, whose reputation was enough to cause the wits to laugh when Sir Simon escorted her into the coffee house. In the illusory, nonrealistic world of Restoration theater, this juxtaposition is itself a source of the comic. Because the audience accepts the mingling, it can enjoy the varied comedy of opposing humours and different social classes and types interacting.

All of the foregoing suggests that William Wycherley is playing on the audience's sense of superiority by doing what was popular---attacking the pious puritan fraud (Gripe), and the humour butts (Crossbite, Flippant). In addition he plays upon their identification with a common social sin--affectation and false wit. Acts III-V reinforce this notion in theme and situation. Act III is primarily more of the predictable low and wit plots, predictable situations, and the introduction of themes that run throughout

his four plays: the increasingly dominant mercenary point of view that adversely affects human relationships and therefore the fabric of society, and the growing attack on social honesty by social veneer.

Crossbite's venality, for instance, is revealed in her use of her daughter, Lucy, to gain material reward. When she sees the opportunity to have all of her needs met by Alderman Gripe she decides that Dapperwit, who she only minutes before defended as the provider for her family, is now "vile." In the process she indicates her disregard for marriage unless it has the appropriate financial rewards. Lucy, the object of Dapperwit and Gripe's affections, is characterized as an impressionable woman looking for access to a mode of living that seems out of reach. She wants to live the fantasy of fashionable life, she wants to "have good Cloaths, plate, Jewels, and things so well about me; that my Neighbours, the little Gentlemen's Wives, of Fifteen hundred, or Two thousand pound a year, should have retir'd into the country, sick with envy, of my prosperity and greatness" (III,i,85-9). She wants to society more than humanity. And her mother is more than happy to sell her to Gripe, who at this point is the highest bidder. But she is worldly wise enough and greedy enough to know that she can use the appearance of impropriety to turn the tables on Gripe with the threat of blackmail.

In addition to this scene we have others that nicely display Wycherley's comic skill and that provide an opportunity for the actors and actresses to make their comic points. This is particularly true of the later scene in Act III where the lustful motivation of Gripe and the mercenary ends of Joyner are nicely displayed. Before Mrs. Joyner will leave Gripe,

who loves his "privacy," particularly "in times of need", with Lucy, she is able to have him double the amount of money he will pay for the treat that she is to fetch and the one he hopes to have. The scene wonderfully illustrates Wycherley's ability with humours characters, sexual comedy, and timing. In this case we see the ability of Joyner to seize upon a character's weakness -- Gripe's lust, and to best him by making him part with that which he holds most dear--his money.

Joyner and Gripe have gone on a mission of mercy. Gripe's public motivation is to "redeem" Lucy from a life of immorality, but it quickly takes on another tone. Mrs. Joyner has only been able to squeeze a groat from the miserly Gripe. So in order to extract more, she brings Lucy into the room for Gripe to see. The stage direction has Lucy "hang[ing] backwards as she enters." As the dialogue heats up, Gripe tries to draw Lucy closer to where he is sitting. She feigns innocence as Joyner takes advantage of the situation. Visualize John Lacy on the forestage, looking salaciously at Lucy from a distance, and torn between satisfying himself physically or holding on to his money:

Gripe. . . .prethee go fetch our Treat now.

Joyner. A Treat of a Groat, I will not wag.

Gripe. Why don't you go? here, take more money, and
fetch what you will; take here, half a Crown.

Joyner. What will a half a Crown do?

Gripe. Take a Crown then, an Angel, a Piece; be
gone.

Joyner. A Treat only will not serve my turn, I must
buy the poor Wretch there some toys.

Gripe. What toys? what? speak quickly.

Joyner. Pendants, Neck-laces, Fans, Ribbons,
Poynts, Laces, Stockings, Gloves--

Gripe. Hold, hold, before it comes to a Gown.

Joyner. Well remember'd, Sir, indeed she wants a

Gown, for she has but that one to her back;
 for your own sake you should give a her a new
 Gown; for variety of Dresses, rouses desire,
 and makes an old Mistress seem every day a
 new one.

Gripe. For that reason she shall have no new Gown;
 for I am naturally constant, and as I am
 still the same, I love she shou'd be still
 the same' but here take half a piece for the
 other things.

Joyner. Half a Piece----

Gripe. Prethee be gone, take t'other Piece then;
 two Pieces, three Pieces, five Pieces; here
 'tis all I have.
 (III,iii,34-370)

After Joyner has "rous'd desire," and taken his money, Wycherley's own
 brand of comedy and poetic justice takes over:

Lucy. . . . Sir? don't lock me in, Sir.

[Fumbling at the door, locks it]

Gripe. 'Tis a private lesson, I must teach you
 fair.

Lucy. I don't see your Fidle, Sir, where is your
 little Kitt?

Gripe. I'll shew it thee presently Sweetest;
 Necessity, Mother of invention; [*Gripe*
setting a Chair against the dore] Come my
 dearest, [*Takes her in his arms*]

Lucy. What do you mean, Sir? don't hurt me, Sir,
 will you -- oh, oh, you will kill me! murder,
 murder, oh, oh, -help, help, oh ----
 (III,ii,381-89)

Enter now Crossbite, her Landlord and his apprentice, and Gripe is forced
 to part with 5,000 pounds in order to maintain his reputation. This is
 comedy not complexity.

Scene II between Dapperwit and Ranger is required only to
 reinforce the comic notions of Dapperwit's "wit" and Ranger's caterwauling.
 As a comic set piece, it is a good example of Wycherley's use of double

entendre and physical comedy and a clear indication of how Wycherley expected the Restoration audience to view both men. Here we have Dapperwit bringing Ranger to see his Lucy:

Dap. Miss Lucy, Miss Lucy - - - [Knocks at the door, and returns] the Devil take me, if good men (I say no more) have not been upon their knees to me, to see her, and you at least must obtain it.

Ran. I do not believe you.

Dap. 'Tis such a she, she is beautiful, without affectation, amorous without impertinency, airy, and brisk without impudence, frolick without rudeness; and in a word, the justest creature breathing to her asignation.

Ran. You praise her, as if you had a mind to part with her; and yet you resolve, I see to keep her to your self.

Dap. Keep her, poor Creature, she cannot leave me; and rather then leave her, I woul'd leave writing Lampoons or Sonnets almost.

Ran. Well, I'll leave you with her then.

Dap. What will you go without seeing her?

Ran. Rather than stay without seeing her.

.....
Dap. Well she's a ravishing Creature, such eyes, and lips, Mr. Ranger.

Ran. Prethee go.

Dap. Such neck and breasts, Mr. Ranger.

Ran. Again, prethee go.

Dap. Such feet, legs, and thighs, Mr. Ranger.

Ran. Prethee let me see 'em.

(III,ii,23-37 and 55-61)

In the reading, this scene may seem too long, and even more tedious still because it does not develop character or advance any of the plots, but Wycherley is not too interested in plot development. What he is after, laughter and anticipation, are what result. Wycherley is building anticipation for Ranger's first meeting with Lucy. Picture Ranger's interest and excitement building, as he paces the proscenium, his lines delivered in

an excited and quickening manner-- only to be followed by a farcical tug-of-war over a comb, the public use of which suggested ill-breding to this primarily well-to-do crowd. The comedy here is in the timing, and in the self-revealing way that Dapperwit, and Ranger, show that they want wit. The goal of the scene has been met--it is funny in the hands of good actors--acting in the appropriate artificial style.

What did Wycherley's audience feel--superiority in comparison to Gripe, titilation at the sensuality of certain scenes, guilt for their own affectations? These are all possibilities. But by Act V when all the conflicts are resolved, happily and not, and justice is meted out through the use of marriage⁴⁰ we know at least in part what Wycherley intended.

The marriages and proposed matches arranged by Wycheley are in keeping with the way his characters view human relationships. Martha and Dapperwit marry ostensibly to punish the foolish antics of Sir Simon who let another man make him a match, and for revenge on Alderman Gripe, her father. Dapperwit thinks he has an heiress worth 30,000 pounds, but he really has a new bride six months with child. Gripe promises to marry Lucy on the following day hoping to "get Heirs to exclude my Daughter" and frustrate Dapperwit. Additionally "it's agreed on all hands, 'tis cheaper keeping a Wife then a Wench." Sir Simon and Lady Flippant, the foolish knight and the fortune hunting widow, marry thinking each has a fortune.

⁴⁰See Sujit Mukherjee, "Marriage as Punishment in the Plays of Wycherley," *Review of English Literature*, 7 (1966), pp. 61-64, and P.F. Vernon, "Marriage of Convenience and the Moral Code of Restoration Comedy," *ELC*, 12 (1962), pp. 370-87.

Lydia and the reformed Ranger, we are led to believe, will join in wedded bliss on the following day.

For some the Lydia-Ranger route is the model relationship because it appears more realistic in that it is agreed to after a period of trial and uncertainty, and because it involves promises and commitments. There is some suspicion that Ranger's reformation could result in a relapse. For some critics, the Valentine-Christina pairing is a model because it is without the venality and lasciviousness that characterizes the groupings in the low plot. Because of its extreme insistence on honor and love, the Christina-Valentine match is too idealistic to be meaningful, an assessment supported by the parody in its presentation. The fact is that not one of the relationships is offered as a model. Wycherley avoids preaching to an audience that was interested in the serious concerns of its day and mankind. The execution of the play does suggest by negative example that a marriage that two people desire and work for, and that is grounded in realistic commitments, is the best possible match. Unhappy in his own marriages, Wycherley might have believed that the only route to freedom is in joining forces with one you love freely.

While *Love in a Wood*'s many great comic moments (it did gain Wycherley some reputation) show ample evidence of Wycherley's promise, it is not without its weaknesses. Fujimura notes, as have others, that the play is more "notable for isolated instances of wit than for successful integration of the various elements that constitute a comedy of wit."⁴¹ But Fujimura's

⁴¹Fujimura, *The Restoration Comedy of Wit*, p. 128.

practice of measuring the play by imposing a false standard that he calls the comedy of wit is inappropriate, and even more inappropriate here when what he is addressing is the text, and not the performance, of *Love in a Wood*. The fact is that this highly imitative play is peopled by characters who are "desperately rushing forward," though they "nevertheless remain, despite their efforts, in exactly the place to which their own values assign them." What we have are characters who embody "faith and jealousy, male and female wit, lechery and avarice,"⁴² thrown together. Wycherley's audience found that for comic purposes they mixed rather well.

III

Love in a Wood: An Assessment

So what are we to make of this funny play that is admittedly not Wycherley's best, but is nonetheless filled with great fun and entertainment? The earlier analysis showed that the seventeenth century interest in satire, comedy and wit was not as complicated as critics like to suggest. To his age, Wycherley was a satirist, a writer who invited his audience to apply a predictable standard to the predictable behavior it witnessed on the stage. Our present tendency is to find "heroes" and "heroines", "complexities," "development," "ambiguities," and characters who function as spokespersons for the dramatists of the period. In *Love in a Wood*, there is no single

⁴²Zimbardo, *Wycherley's Drama: A Link in the Development of English Satire*, p. 44.

spokesman for Wycherley, there are no heroes and heroines, no complexities. All the characters have the shortcomings that are common to the race. We have predictable characters and predictable situations wonderfully drawn.

Like his contemporaries, Wycherley is not making subtle distinctions between comedy and satire,⁴³ and *Love in a Wood* is neither a subtle play or a trifle. When viewed as Restoration theater, acted before an audience of primarily lords and ladies, there is little doubt as to how Wycherley thought we should respond.

One can argue confidently that the behavior of the characters in the low plot is not suitable for imitation. William Wycherley has not presented them as role models, but has exposed their vices and follies for a satiric end. Though treated comically Gripe, Flippant, Joyner, and the rest are living by a system of values that has a monetary rather than a moral basis. The audience's response to their lack of success in human relationships suggests that Wycherley found their system wanting. The wit plot in isolation is an entertaining and laughing satire on the follies of false wit and dissembling. The follies we encounter here, in the characters of Dapperwit and Ranger primarily, harm only those who possess them. There is no danger of this superficial world of appearances being undermined by the likes of Dapperwit, a character that no one takes seriously anyway. Wits, false or true, like him simply provide a never-ending spectacle for

⁴³Ben Ross Schneider, Jr., *The Ethos of Restoration Comedy* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1971), p. 15.

those who enjoy watching. Alderman Gripe and Lucy are punished with a match that only promises problems--cuckolding for him, and a jailer for her.

We might initially delight in the "reformation" and intended match of Ranger and Lydia. It appears that Ranger has come to realize that there can be freedom in commitment though the suspicion exists that in a universe where muddled love is the norm, Wycherley's ambiguity does not close the book.⁴⁴ We have heard Ranger promise love before and we know that he is a dissembler. The high plot, finally, a parody of the heroic exhibiting the qualities of intense romantic love is not the solution. The love of Christina and Valentine could not overcome rumor and jealousy. It truly is a love that is "fictive and illusory."⁴⁵

It is probably true that "little of the 'satire' in [*Love in a Wood*] really lashes the abuses of the age."⁴⁶ Wycherley's satire here is not specific as to people, place or time. Rather it is of a general nature, supporting universal values by attacking very general and common vices and affectations drawn in the extreme. The play is without a really consistent satiric stance taken against "punctilious insistence on honor, false wit, coxcombry,"⁴⁷ as Fujimura argues, but there is the obvious suggestion

⁴⁴P.F. Vernon, "Marriage of Convenience and the Moral Code of Restoration Comedy, *ELC*, 12 (1962), p. 379.

⁴⁵Rump, "Theme and Structure in *Love in a Wood*, p. 333.

⁴⁶Craik, "Some Aspects of Satire in Wycherley's Plays," p. 169.

⁴⁷Fujimura, *The Restoration Comedy of Wit*, p. 119.

that the venality and hypocrisy exhibited by some of Wycherley's characters are morally and personally, if not socially, corrupting. The danger, suggests Wycherley, comes from the brand of falseness exhibited in the low plot where the dark, mordant satire of *The Plain Dealer* is seen in its infancy. The hypocrisy of Alderman Gripe and Lady Flippant remains comic, and not dangerous, because no one believes that they possess a morality they do not. When viewed in this light it is erroneous to say that "Wycherley has not concerned himself with the morality of actions, but simply with what can be made of actions in terms of entanglements and surprises."⁴⁸ The diverse motivations for love relationships and the moral basis that they lack are his concerns throughout the play.

There are two conclusions that a look to the Restoration milieu helps us reach. The first is that *Love in a Wood* is an entertaining look at variety of human relationships -- clever and funny enough to earn Wycherley some reputation, but too conventional to build a reputation on. The second is that Wycherley is clearly a serious writer familiar with the likes and dislikes of his audience, familiar with dramatic predecessors and contemporaries, the actors and actresses of his day, and most importantly familiar with the theater. At this point in his career he had found his niche. He knew now that he excelled in general satire, and he knew how to draw characters that would engage, entertain and instruct his audience.

⁴⁸Craik, "Some Aspects of Satire in Wycherley's Plays," p. 171.

CHAPTER III

"THE GENTLEMAN DANCING-MASTER: SPECTACLE FOR THE CITY"

The obvious differences between the simply plotted, five character farce *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* and the multiplotted, character-filled *Love in a Wood* have been noted by all of Wycherley's commentators. The obvious similarities in theme, the attacks on social pretentiousness, hypocrisy, affectation that are all very prominent in the Wycherley canon, have also been consistently noted. The major difference, the simplicity of the action, is usually explained by noting that the experiment of juggling so much in the first play caused Wycherley to opt for a simpler structure for his second play.¹ This explanation is only partially satisfactory because Wycherley maintains two levels of theater in *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*--one in the world of romance and one in the world of farce--making the play not so unlike *Love in a Wood* where characters operate in the world of wit, romance, and low comedy. The interesting question is which of the two levels dominates--the action of the title or the antics of the farce. While the

¹The obvious differences noted by Chadwick include 21 scenes, 10 settings and 11 major characters in *Love in A Wood*, to 6 scenes, 2 settings and 5 major characters in *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*.

experience of his first play probably had some influence on the second, *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* also owes its form to the significant changes in the theater audience of the early 1670's, the changing nature of the comic drama, and Restoration production practices.

I

Audience and Practice

The realities of the theatrical world in late 1671 include a gradually changing audience; a continuously evolving drama with experimentation, hybrid forms, new modes and character types; and the continued competition for the small segment of the population that was paying for theater by the two licensed companies. The extent to which the two theater companies were at least influenced by audience taste is suggested by the almost immediate duplication of each other's successes. We know that competitive pressures required that what worked successfully for the Duke's company was quickly countered or copied by the King's Company and vice versa. Davenant's popularly received introduction of scenes and machinery at the new Dorset Gardens Theatre, where *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* premiered, for example, motivated Killigrew to incorporate the same full scale into his new theater in Drury Lane.²

²Avery and Scouten, *The London Stage, 1660-1700*, pp. xxvii and lxxxiv. See also Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century*, p. 267. The notion that a combination of audience makeup, availability of actors and actresses, and what was currently enjoying success in the theater affected the creation of new plays has been convincingly established.

When Wycherley consciously analyzed his audience late in 1671 he surely noted a significant change from even a year earlier. As we have established, the audience that greeted the re-opening of the theaters in 1660 was courtly and aristocratic for the most part. By late 1671-72, however, it was changing; there was a documentable shift from the homogeneous, upper class group to an audience that was more heterogeneous, having a more "city" and "middle class" character than in prior years. In fact, by early 1672, the time *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* premiered, the audience was more middle class than it had been since the theaters reopened.³ Moreover, its interests in spectacle, music, dance, and sex, were beginning to have a profound effect on the Restoration theater.

Accompanying and allied to the changes that were taking place in the audience makeup is the abrupt rise in literary criticism during the early years of the 1670's. The fact that new modes of drama were developing (sex, horror, and farce), and the more established serious drama (the rhymed heroic play) was beginning to wane,⁴ helped encourage continued discussion about the nature of comedy, and resulted in Restoration drama being "a

³See above pp. 44ff.

⁴See Robert Hume's discussion of the waning serious rhymed heroic drama in Chapter 7, "Sex, Horror, Farce, and the Heroic Inclination in the Seventies," of *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century*, pp. 269-339.

conscious experiment with form."⁵ Some have attributed the documentable shift in the nature of comic drama to a crucial swing toward middle class tastes in 1672 while the gentry was out fighting the Anglo-Dutch war, leaving the theaters to the citizens.⁶ Even if another cause⁷ is identified there is no doubt that the Restoration theater was changing. While the changing audience was not the sole agent for change in the drama, as a public medium the theatre was, and is, influenced by the tastes of those who pay admission.

The Prologue and Epilogue to *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* indicate that Wycherley felt he was addressing a new crowd. As devices clearly intended to communicate directly with the theater audience, prologues and epilogues were given careful and critical attention by the spectators.⁸ The Prologue, here directed to "the CITY," the middle class

⁵Cynthia Matlack, "Parody and Burlesque of Heroic Ideals in Wycherley's Comedies: A Critical Reinterpretation of Contemporary Evidence, *PLL*, 8 (1972), p. 273.

⁶Pierre Dachin argues for a swing toward citizen tastes in 1671-72. As evidence he uses prologue and epilogues of the period. See "Le Public des theatres londoniens a l'epoque de la Restauration d'apres les prologues et les epilogues," *Dramatargie et Societe*, ed. Jean Jacquot, 2 vols. (Paris, 1968, II, 847-88. Cited in Hume, *The Development of Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century*, p. 26.

⁷Hume, *The Development of Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century*, p. 282. Hume accepts the changes but doubts that they affected theatrical fads and fashions.

⁸Emmett L. Avery, "Rhetorical Patterns in Restoration Prologues and Epilogues," reprinted in *Essays in American and English Literature to Bruce L. McElderry, Jr.*, ed. Max Schultz, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1967), pp. 221-37.

merchants and the portion of London that was their business home, states that the play is to be performed before a "substantial Pit,/Where needy Wit, or Critick dare not come,/Lest Neighbour i'the Cloak ...Shou'd prove a Dunne". This and other contrasting references to "citizens" and "wits" argue in favor of an audience possessing slightly different characteristics than those for whom Wycherley wrote his first play.

Even the restricted subject matter of the play-- primarily relationships among members of the merchant class---would have had the greatest appeal to a more mercantile audience. The wit play that pleased the aristocratic crowd is here subordinated to the farcical representations of sartorial excess. Dominating the production are scenes of farce, spectacle and music, designed for less sophisticated tastes, that alternate with the scenes of romance and wit.

The dramatic options Wycherley finally chose to incorporate in his play are clearly not new. Rather than imitating the modern or Etheregian comedy that is developing, Wycherley is harkening back to Dryden, Shadwell and James Howard.⁹ This is worth noting because it suggests that Wycherley was more comfortable at this stage of his career using proven guidelines from the established, generally moralistic, tradition rather than experimenting with the new "amoral" comic mode of some of his contemporaries.¹⁰

⁹Hume, p. 283.

¹⁰There is a school of thought that finds that the comedy of Etherege advances an amoral position. By this I mean that it makes neither

There are two important assumptions that affect the discussion of *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*: first, it is popular, farcical theater, written for a mixed audience increasingly interested in spectacle, and combining many of the day's proven popular established dramatic elements; and second, that the dramatic experience of the play was determined by both the text and the staging.¹¹ Viewing the play as theater, imagining the performance, and applying evidence from the contemporary dramatic scene shows *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* to be something other than a failure of invention. While much of *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* is conventional, it is the handling of the conventional, and the implied declaration of intent, that should command our attention.

a "right" nor "wrong" judgment with respect to social behavior dramatized in *The Man of Mode*, for example. For a summary of the argument for an against such a position see Robert Hume, pp. 92-97. For Hume's position see, "Reading and Misreading *The Man of Mode*," *Criticism*, 14 (1972), pp. 1-11.

¹¹Avery and Scouten, *The London Stage*, p. lxxxiv. See also Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance*. For a discussion of the farce in the Restoration see Eric Bentley, *The Life of the Drama*, p. 252, and Leo Hughes, *A Century of English Farce* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956). Chadwick notes with reference to *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* that farce is a visual art relying primarily on "facial contortions, physical posturing, ludicrous costumes, and the like, none of which are really evident in the 'bare text'"(p. 58).

II

Performance and the Play

The Gentleman Dancing-Master was first performed in 1672 by the Duke's Company at the 280 seat Dorset Gardens Theater. Commentary on the play typically runs as follows: the play is "too farcical" and "uneven";¹² it suffers from "a failure of inventiveness,"¹³ and summarily it is "a trifle"¹⁴ or "a very poor piece."¹⁵ In general, critics decry the absence of moral ambiguity and inventiveness that makes *The Country Wife* and *The Plain Dealer* more interesting literary works. While it does not compare favorably with *The Country Wife* and *The Plain Dealer* as literary productions, *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* is noteworthy as Restoration theater, with entertaining flashes of wit, sex, intrigue, song, dance,

¹²Fujimura, *The Restoration Comedy of Wit*, p. 133.

¹³Virginia Ogden Birdsall, *Wild Civility: The English Comic Spirit on the Restoration Stage* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 128.

¹⁴T.W. Craik, "Some Aspects of Satire in Wycherley's Plays," *English Studies*, 41 (1960), p. 172.

¹⁵D.R.M. Wilkinson, *The Comedy of Habit: An Essay of the Use of Courtesy Literature in a Study of Restoration Comic Drama* (Leiden: Universitaire Pers, 1964), p. 66.

spectacle, and farce.¹⁶ That the play is not up to the standard of *The Country Wife* is not at issue. What is at issue is the extent to which the Restoration theater milieu can help provide a standard for evaluating *The Gentleman Dancing Master*, a play that is so dependent upon production, so visual, that the text alone is not so helpful a guide.

The first interesting bit of extratextual speculation involves Wycherley's bringing the play to the Duke's Company rather than to Killigrew and the King's Company. The fact that *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* is the only play Wycherley chose to take to the Duke's company and its new theater has caused Wycherley's biographer to wonder if "the death in the recent fire, January 1672 at the King's theater of the actor Richard Bell, who had played Vincent at the King's in Drury Lane, caused Wycherley to cut a role [of Gerrard] and emphasize Hippolita."¹⁷ The unusually strong female lead in *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* makes for some interesting speculation that any existing imbalance in characterization is a result of cutting. A more plausible explanation for the move, and one that has met with at least tacit approval, was the presence of the Duke's Company's stars, John Nokes and Edward Angel, actors ideally suited for the parts of the farcical characters, Monsieur de Paris and Don Diego. As John Dennis reports, it was clearly a Restoration commonplace that "most of

¹⁶Montague Summers, *The Playhouse of Pepys* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1935), p. 315. Interestingly a critic like Summers, who has a theater orientation, finds the play "full of life."

¹⁷McCarthy, *William Wycherley: A Biography*, p. 53.

the writers for the stage in my time have not only adapted their characters to their actors but those actors have as it were sate for them. For which reason the Lustre of the most Shining of their Characters must decay with the Actors."¹⁸

Nokes in particular was noted for successfully playing farcical roles. Five months after the opening of Wycherley's play, Nokes played the part of Mamamouchi in Ravenscroft's *The Citizen Turn'd Gentleman*, a play that "was look[ed] upon by the Criticks for a Foolish Play; yet it continu'd Acting 9 days with a full House; . . . Mr. Nokes, in performing the *Mamamouchi* pleas'd the King and Court."¹⁹ In recounting the early history of the stage, Colley Cibber describes characteristics that suggest why Nokes would have made a fantastically funny Paris:

He scarcely ever made his first entrance in a play, but he was received with an involuntary applause, not of hands only. . . but by a general laughter, which the very sight of him provoked, and nature could not resist; yet the louder the laugh, the graver was his look upon it; and, surely, the ridiculous solemnity of his features was enough to have set a whole bench of bishops into a titter . . . In ludicrous distresses, which, by the laws of comedy, folly is often involved in, he sunk, into such a mixture of piteous pusillanimity, and a consternation so ruefully ridiculous and inconsolable, that when he had shaken you to a fatigue of laughter, it become a moot point whether you ought not to have pitied him.²⁰

¹⁸John Dennis, "Reflections Critical and Satyrical," *Critical Works*, I, p.418.

¹⁹"Roscius Anglicanus, or an Historical Review of the Stage," from *The Garland Series, The English Stage: Attack and Defense, 1577-1730*, ed. Arthur Freedman (New York: Garland Press, 1974), p. 32.

²⁰Cibber, *An Apology for The Life of Colley Cibber*, pp. 141ff.

Even if we allow for some license in the reporting of Cibber, evidence clearly suggests that Nokes was "the most accomplished clown of all," and a popular "partner and foil to Angel."²¹ Given the dominance of the farce (Paris has thirty more speeches than Hippolita), it is reasonable to conclude that the play is consciously and predominantly comedy of spectacle,²² a "one joke" play successfully enlivened by the establishment of intimacy with its audience (clever use of asides, and double entendres that function as asides, numerous allusions to the popular places around town, and to current affairs like the Anglo-Dutch conflict) and by the variety of its comic devices (dance, sword play, music, visual humor). Seen from the perspective of the Restoration theater world, *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* was intended to be what Summers described as "a capital *acting* play. . . agreeably varied and so neatly handled that far from wearying it seems to gain a fresh interest as the intrigue develops".²³

In reading, the plot of *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* is as indisputably simple as the plot of *Love in a Wood* is varied. Hippolita, the

²¹Hughes, *A Century of English Farce* , p.157.

²²An interesting question is who played Hippolita. Mrs. Betterton, known primarily for her tragic roles, had some reputation as a comic actress, and she acted with Nokes in the *The Citizen's Revenge*. Moll Davies, known for her singing and dancing, had by all accounts retired from the stage four years earlier.

²³Summers, *The Playhouse of Pepys*, p. 315.

daughter of a merchant who affects extreme Spanish airs, has been promised in marriage to the Frenchified Monsieur de Paris, the son of a merchant, who after a short tour in France has picked up what the English ridiculed as the "French habit." Don Diego, her father, to insure that his daughter will be remain chaste until marriage, has had her under the constant watch of Mrs. Caution, "an impertinent and precise" old woman. In an exhibition of her wit, Hippolita manages to have the gull, Paris, play an active role in finding her a match she believes more suitable. Paris even goes so far as to bring to her a man she has never met, to work unknowingly to keep bringing them together, and finally to help keep their courtship undiscovered. The resolution of the plot is the progress of Hippolita and Gerrard to a balanced love based on mutual interest and respect. Unlike most of the comedy of the period, there are no elaborate subplots. The Flirt and Flounce subplot was primarily intended to provide a contrast to the Gerrard-Hippolita relationship and to diversify the theatrical experience; the former it does more successfully than the latter. As to plot there is no critical controversy.

Likewise there is general agreement as to character. In *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*, as in *Love in a Wood*, Wycherley is borrowing from the long established Restoration comic tradition that involved the use of humours characters. For the most part, Wycherley's creations are two dimensional caricatures representing excesses or affectations. As a result, there is little dispute about character, character motivation or Wycherley's attitude toward his creations. Mrs. Caution, Diego, Paris, Prue, Flirt and Flounce are flat characters, and as such their behavior is generally

predictable. In spite of being predictable and flat, however, they remain interesting because of Wycherley's cleverness in creating contrasting extremes. Mrs. Caution, for example, is a package of repressed sexual energy, who is contrasted with the "plump" and "pleasing" Prue who is comical, frank, and sensual. Prue represents "the natural inclinations of youth and of the present, set against the conscience and repression of age and of the past".²⁴ Even though Mrs. Caution is a stock character assuming the role of watch dog, her repressed sensuality and her determination to do her job, all amusingly presented, make her memorable in the way that Lady Flippant, Widow Blackacre, and Lady Jaspar Fidget are memorable. While Caution and Prue's characters are dominated by the physical, Don Diego is set against them as the asexual "Spanish eunuch" who comically has no idea, for example, that the dancing instructions he shouts to his daughter are laced with sexual suggestion. Gerrard and Paris are less cleverly cast as opposites, one lacking the wit the other possesses.

The audience of 1672 would have seen nothing too new nor too difficult to understand in *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*. The focus of the play, the ridiculousness of affectations and excessive jingoism, is almost too obvious. As the *Dramatis Personae* suggests, both Mr. Formal and Mr. Parris are men who have completely given themselves over to their affectations to the point of even forsaking their Christian names. Mr. James Formal is known to the world as Don Diego, and Mr. Parris, as Monsieur de Paris. It must be remembered that at this time England was entering its third war

²⁴Birdsall, *Wild Civility*, p. 129.

with the Dutch. Wycherley, aware of the centuries old disputes between France and Spain, ridicules pointless jingoistic and nationalistic sentiments by using the French-Spanish enmity as his illustration. This political backdrop, however, is a very small element in a play where understanding requires knowledge of production techniques more than a knowledge of current affairs. The question before us is whether the farce involving the conflict between Diego and Paris was intended to vary the depiction of the progress of a romance, or intended to entertain a less sophisticated theater crowd with the antics of the most popular farceurs of the day?

The opening scene is dominated by spectacle of sight and sound. Even before Monsieur de Paris makes his stage entrance, the audience learns from the opening exchange between Prue and Hippolita that he is a "Fool" and an "Idiot" (I,i,45). After this introduction, Paris enters with a affectedly grand air, and speaks with a repetitive style that immediately invites ridicule:

"Serviteur, Serviteur, la Cousine, I come to
give the *bon Soir*, as the *French* say" (I, i, 88).

In addition to delighting in the comic acting skill of Nokes, the audience would have been amused by the visual humor of Paris's costume.

Dominating his dress were French pantaloons, pleated petticoat breeches with wide legs that reached below the knees. These skirt-like breeches were in this case decorated with "gee-gaw Ribbons" (I,i,187). As a clear deviation from either acceptable English or French dress, Paris, like Sir Fopling

Flutter who will follow him, was the immediate object of laughter for affectation in dress, manner and speech.

Paris is the visual representation of a fool and the first of Wycherley's many visual jokes. Even though Paris has developed a style designed to draw attention to himself, his grand entrance and attire fail to elicit anything but the opposite reaction from the other two characters on the stage, Prue and Hippolita, who continue their conversation about the possibility of Hippolita finding a more desirable match. Paris immediately interjects himself into the conversation at the mention of "the fine Gentlemen, they talk of so much in Town." Because Paris fancies himself such a man, or at least one who would surely keep such company, he begins naming, in what must have been a very bad French accent, those of his acquaintance who fit the description. After a litany of French names, he mentions Gerrard:

Hipp. What kind of man is that Mr. Gerrard?...

Mons. Why--he is truly a pretty man, a pretty man

----a

pretty, so so----kind of man, for an *English-*
man.

Hipp. How! a pretty man?

Mons. Why, he is conveniently tall----but--

Hipp. But what?

Mons. And not ill-shap'd--but--

Hipp. But what?

Mons. And handsome, as tis thought-but--

Hipp. But, what are your Exceptions to him?

Mons. I can't tell you because they are
innumerable, innumerable mon foy.

Hipp. Has he Wit?

Mons. Ay, ay, they say he's witty, brave, and de
bel humeur and well-bred with all that --but-

Hipp. But what? he wants Judgment?

Mons. Non, non, they say he has good sense and
judgment, but it is according to the account
Englis'-- for ---

Hipp. For what?

Mons. For Jarnie--if I think it--

Hipp. Why?

Mons. Why--why his Taylor lives within *Ludgate*--
his Valet de Chambre is no *French*-man--and he
has been seen at noon-day to go into an
English Eating house--

Hipp. Say you so, Cousin?

Mons. Then for being well-bred you shall judge--
first he can't dance a step, nor sing a
French song, nor swear a *French* Oate, nor use
the polite *French* word in his Conversation;
and in fine, can't play at Hombre--but speaks
base good *Englis* with the commume homebred
pronunciation, and in fine, to say no more,
he ne're carries a Snuff-box about with him.

Hipp. Indeed--

Mons. And yet this man has been abroad as much as
any man, and does not make the least shew of
it, but a little in his Meen, not at all in
his discour Jernie; he never talks so much as
of *St. Peters* Church, and *Rome*, the *Escorial*,
or *Madrid*, nay not so much as of *Henry IV.* of
Pont-Neuf, *Paris*, and the new *Louvre*, nor of
the *Grand Roy*.

Hipp. 'Tis for his commendation, if he does not
talk of his Travels.

Mons. Auh, auh,--Cousine--he is conscious himself
of his wants, because he is very envious, for
he cannot endure me--
(I,i, 88-143).

Here is the satiric representation of the excesses of the Frenchified
Englishman and the extravagancies of the beau.

Wycherley's dramatic skill is apparent in this opening scene which
compresses self-condemnation into the dialogue of Paris, reinforces
Hippolita's negative feeling about her potential match with Paris, provides a
description of Gerrard that puts him in opposition to Paris both in the
minds of the audience and in the heart of Hippolita, demonstrates
Hippolita's wit, and adumbrates Wycherley's satiric and thematic concerns

of excesses in behavior and the desirability and need for freedom of choice in human relationships. In less than 150 lines we have the conflict of the play introduced in an engaging and humorous manner.

As the ridiculous Paris leaves the stage laughing about the jest he is to play tonight, the audience gets its first look at Mrs. Caution, Don Diego's appointed guardian of his daughter's virtue. It is this conversation between crabbed age and youth that establishes Hippolita as the witty heroine and introduces the romantic wit plot so familiar to theater-goers of the time. Like other women in Restoration comedies, Hippolita feels that the twelve months she has spent in isolation make her eligible to take advantage of all of the "innocent liberties of the Town, to tattle to your men under a Vizard in the Play-houses, and meet 'em at night in Masquerade" (I,i,296-98). As far as Hippolita is concerned "this is a pleasant-well-bred-complacent-free-frolick good natur'd-pretty-Age," (I,i, 311-12) and if Mrs. Caution does not like it then she can leave it to those that do.

Scene Two, which takes place in the French house, the only other setting in the play, allows Nokes another opportunity to dominate with his visual excesses. As the scene develops, the audience expects to hear Paris invite Gerrard to visit Hippolita because the plot requires it. What it gets, however, is some 320 lines of dialogue and action that demonstrate Monsieur de Paris's foolishness, and less than 50 lines moving the plot along to the meeting of Gerrard and Hippolita. At this point Wycherley is interested in his scene as much if not more than his plot. Wycherley allows Paris to attack himself by being his affected self, and in the process Wycherley pauses to take a satiric stab at the Dutch, and the frenchified Englishman,

here typified by the son of a merchant who has been ruined by a trip to France. The predominance of visual humor over wit play in this scene suggest Wycherley's primary intent was to create a farce dominated comic spectacle. The wit play of the Hippolita-Gerrard plot line was probably intended to elevate the farce, a genre not held in high esteem by some of Wycherley's contemporaries.²⁵ In any case *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* is not dominated by the actions of a woman, though Hippolita atypically dominates one strand of the action.

After Gerrard mocks Paris's social pretensions by suggesting that Paris picked up what little he knows of France and its language from French footmen, Paris offers aural and ocular support to Wycherley's spectacular intentions:

"turning the Nation *Francez* into ridicule,
 dat Nation so accomlie, dat Nation which
 you imitate, so, dat in the conclusion you
 butte turn your self into ridicule mon foy:
 if you are for de raillery, abuse the *Duch*,
 why not abuse the *Duch*? les grosse Villaines,
 Pandars, Insolents; but her in your *England*
 ma foy, you have more honeur, respect, and
 estimation for de Dushe Swabber, who come to
 cheat your Nation, den for de Franch-Foot-man
 who come to oblidge your Nation" (I,ii,63-70).

Needless to say, Gerrard and Martin, and every Englishman in the theater, were glad to hear that Paris has disowned his nation. For them it would

²⁵Chadwick argues that the Horation epigraph, "It is not enough to make the audience laugh aloud, though even in this there is a kind of merit," is "an indirect apology for the lowness of the comedy," an apology motivated by Wycherley's own dislike of farce. *The Plays of William Wycherley*, pp. 54-55.

have meant one less member of a type that was apparently prevalent enough to warrant repeated satiric attack.²⁶

This discussion and the attack on the Dutch, who at that time were engaged in hostilities with the English, is really out of context as far as development of the Gerrard-Hippolita plot is concerned, but as we have already noted this is more a modern concern than a realistic criterion for evaluating Restoration comedy. Wycherley, like other dramatists of the time who loved to include topical allusions, is clearly stretching to include the topical reference²⁷ and the opportunity for an additional comic scene, as he is by the introduction of the Flirt and Flounce subplot. The French house scene encourages the audience's positive feelings for Gerrard because the Flirt and Flounce interlude serves to characterize him, in contrast to Paris, as a discriminating man who values his reputation (I,ii,231). Moreover, the introduction of Flirt and Flounce allows Wycherley to have Paris lose his fiance and win a woman of less repute.

²⁶I reproduce Arthur Friedman's note on characters like Paris: "The Frenchified Englishman was at this time viewed by some with the same contempt--though not with the same fear--that the Italinat Englishman had been earlier. See, for example, Peter Heylyn, *Cosmography* (1670), p. 299: 'I have met with some Gentlemen, who upon the strength of a little travell in *France*, have grown so *un-Englished*, in respect to the *French*, to be an heavy, dull and Phlegmatick people; of no dispatch, no mettle, no conceit, no audacity, and I know not what, A vanity, merity rather my pity, than my anger.'" *The Plays of William Wycherley*, note 1, p. 145.

²⁷See Harold Love, "State Affairs on the Restoration Stage, 1660-1675," *Restoration and Eighteenth Century Theater Research*, 14 (1975), pp. 1-9. Love discusses, as the title indicates, the extent to which politics was a subject of unfailing interest to the Restoration audience.

It is scenes like these that are used to support the argument that the play is simply a thinly-plotted farce. But to the contemporary audience, this scene in the Frenchhouse, with its attack on the fop with the French veneer, its portrayal of the cool and manly Englishman Gerrard, its two whores aggressively on the prowl, and its jingoistic references to England, would have had all the ingredients for comic engagement. Even though it is only loosely connected to the basic plot, the action does ridicule and reinforce excesses that are elsewhere satirically attacked. The spectacle of Paris singing in his poor French and the stage business of the vizards pushing and detaining other actors on the stage, was also William Wycherley's way of skillfully meeting audience requirements for variety that his single plot line could not meet alone.

By the end of the first act we know Paris for the fool that he is; Hippolita for the witty heroine that she appears to be; Gerrard, who has only been characterized in contrast to Paris, represents all those things that Paris is not; and the conflicts are set in motion: Gerrard vs. Paris, Hippolita vs. Paris, Hippolita vs. Caution, Hippolita vs. Diego, Hippolita vs. Gerrard, Caution vs. Diego, -- good dramaturgy and good comedy. At this point it seems that Wycherley's main interest is Hippolita and Gerrard though this farce is nicely woven into the fabric of the play.

Act II which contains the the third major farcical scene is really more of the same. Here the specific satiric emphasis shifts from the Frenchified Paris to the excessively Spanish Don Diego, without shifting the general emphasis which remains on extreme affectations and excesses in behavior. Visually we have Nokes's partner, Angel, center stage in his

Spanish best. The audience has had ample warning that Hippolita's father has an excessive "Spanish" policy that has kept Hippolita out of the sun for the past year, and a Spanish prudence that had attempted to prevent her from even learning to write (I,i,85). Wycherley surely took maximum advantage of the Restoration costuming practices that used dress to heighten the distinctions between fops and their antagonists in the dramatic conflict.²⁸ The degree of deviation from the norm in fullness of wig, length of coat, color and quantity of ribbons and lace, was the degree to which ridicule was directed toward a character. At the entrance of Diego into the proscenium the audience could have carefully surveyed his dress: a Spanish hat, a Spanish doublet, and a waist belt with dagger. All of this built up comic anticipation for what everyone knew was inevitable--the Paris-Diego meeting. It is this anticipation that would have negated the fact that this is just another clothes joke.

From the visual comedy we move to Wycherley's skill---irony. The next scene has Mrs. Caution assuring Diego that no man, save Paris, has even seen Hippolita just at the very moment that Prue, Hippolita and the recently-arrived Gerrard enter the playing area "at a distance." In the proscenium, Caution is assuring Diego that what we know is about to occur can not possibly occur. It is this physical juxtaposition on the stage and others like it that enable Wycherley to keep audience interest and involvement high in spite of the one plot line.

²⁸Schneider, *The Ethos of Restoration Comedy*, pp. 117 and 119; and Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance*, p. 45ff.

With the stage entrance of the hero and heroine together comes the introduction of what could be termed a romantic wit plot. As was typical of wit plays of the period, the witty couple generally consisted of a young man about town and a emancipated woman. In this case the heroine only appears to be a free-thinker because life has not presented the opportunity for emancipation in reality. The entrance into her life of a witty man gives her the opportunity to demonstrate her status as an equal in the love game that neither took too seriously.²⁹ As a major concern of the playwright, the audience is invited to take this relationship seriously. Almost immediately after meeting, Gerrard and Hippolita indicate by the use of asides that each finds the other attractive:

Ger. She is beautiful beyond all things I
ever saw. [aside.

Hipp. I like him extremely. [aside. (II,i, 60)

Even though Gerrard addresses her in the modish cliches common to the wit game, Hippolita takes "refuge in the pretence of extreme innocence and naivete, something quite alien to her nature."³⁰ This feigned innocence indicates the point at which Hippolita starts in their relationship. Initially Hippolita favors a witty match and a free frolic life that is more naturally of her imagination than of the world she inhabits. After all, she is only fourteen and has only the experience of Hackney school and the poets.

²⁹See Smith, *The Gay Couple in Restoration Comedy*, and David S. Berkeley, "Preciosite and the Restoration Comedy of Manners, *HLQ*, 18 (1954), pp. 109-128.

³⁰Anne Richter, "William Wycherley," p. 44.

Gerrard is also playing a love game, speaking in a inflated style quite unlike what we witnessed in the French coffee house scene. But as his aside indicates, there is something real happening emotionally.

After this romantic interlude, Wycherley needs to quicken the pace, and he does so with more visual comedy. This time it is the spectacle of dance and sword play that provide the needed boost. Upon being discovered by her father with a man, Hippolita proves resourceful. Fearful of discovery, she tells Gerrard to lead her about "as if you lead me a Corant" (II,i, 234). Enraged that his daughter is with a man, Diego draws his sword, only to be restrained by Mrs. Caution. He struggles with Caution, then breaks free and runs at Gerrard, who in turn draws his sword. The witty Hippolita, dropping to her knees between the sword wielding pair, says to Diego, "what will you kill my poor Dancing-master?" (II,i,1 275) and the complication sets in. During Acts II and III the pretend dance remains conventional cover for their flirtation, and Wycherley's extended dramatic irony. Imagine the spectacle on the heels of approximately 225 lines of dialogue: a stage of people shouting, dancing, struggling, and sword fighting.³¹ The combination of the almost constant dialogue with the audience, the stage movement, and the progress of Gerrard and Hippolita helped maintain variety and interest.

³¹See Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance*, p. 64. When the occasion arose to use a sword on the stage anything short of quick confident handling would always. . . be a source of laughter."

And finally Wycherley brings the farce and wit together in one of the play's funnier scenes, the fourth major scene, this time with Mrs. Caution acting the interrogator's part, while engaging in adversarial dialogue with Diego. This is the first of three comic scenes between the "wise" Spaniard and the "wise" old woman, and while the exchanges do slow down the plot's movement toward its denouement, this and the others meet a thematic and entertainment objective:

Caut. Hold, hold! pray, Brother, let's talk with him
a little first, I warrant you I shall trap him,
and if he confesses, you may kill him;...

Don. I, I, but ask him, Sister, if he be a Dancing-
master, where?

Caut. Pray, Brother, let me alone with him, I know
what to ask him, sure!

Don. What will you be wiser than I? nay, then stand
away.

Come, if you are a Dancing-master; where's your
School? adonde, adonde.

Caut. Why, he'll say, may be he has ne're a one.

Don. Who ask'd you nimble Chaps? So you have put an
Excuse in his head.

Ger. Indeed, Sir, 'tis no Excuse, I have no School.

Caut. Well! but who sent you, how came you hither?

Caut. How came you hither, I say? how--

Ger. Why, how, how, how shou'd I come thither?

Don. Ay, how shou'd he come hither? upon his Legs.

Caut. So, so, now you have put an excuse in his head,
too, that you have, so you have, but stay--

Don. Nay, with your favour, Mistress, I'll ask him
now.

Caut. Y facks; but you shan't, I'll ask him, and ask
you no favour that I will.

Don. Y fackins, but you shan't ask him, if you go
there to look you, you Prattle-box you, I'll ask
him.

Caut. I will ask him, I say, come.

Don. Where.

Caut. What.

Don. Mine's a shrewd question.

Caut. Mine's as shrewd as yours.

Don. Nay, then we shall have it; come answer me,
where's your Lodging? come, come, sir.

Caut. A shrewd question indeed, at the Surgeons Arms I
warrant in ---- for 'tis Spring-time, you know.

Don. Must you make lyes for him?

Caut. But come, Sir, what's your name? answer me to
that, come.

Don. His name, why 'tis an easie matter to tell you a
false Name, I hope.

Caut. So, must you teach him to cheat us?

Don. Why did you say my questions were not shrewd
questions then?
(II,i,305-347)

This is an example where a sense of theater is important to understanding Restoration comedy. To fully enjoy this scene we have to imagine Hippolita and Gerrard dancing in the background while her two protectors, those sworn to keep her from the sight of a man until her wedding, stand in the proscenium arguing about who has the shrewder question. Thematically the scene illustrates the foolishness of the two unnaturals who have imprisoned a natural innocent. Furthermore, it adds visual humor as the dancing couple is on display in full view of those who are trying to keep them apart. In the hands of two good stage players this would be an entertaining exchange.

The audience would have accepted Wycherley's alternating between romance and farce. Act III opens with Paris on the farestage, and Diego, who enters in the background, coming forward, "*walking leisurely round the Monsieur surveying him, and shrugging up his shoulders whilst Monsieur makes Legs and Faces.*" Hippolita announces to the audience what it already knows, "We shall have sport anon, betwixt these two Contraries" (III,i, 143):

Don. Is that thing my Cousin, Sister?

Caut. 'Tis he, Sir.

Don. Cousin, I'm sorry to see you.

Mons. Is that a Spanish Complement?

Don. So much disguis'd, Cousin.

Mons. Oh! is it out at last, ventre? [aside.

Serviteur, Serviteur, a Monseur mon Oncle,
and I am glad to see you here within doors,
most Spanish Oncle, ha, ha, ha. But I
should be sorry to see you in the streets,
teste non.

Don. Why soh--would you be asham'd of me, hah---(voto a
St.Jago) wou'd you? hauh---

Mons. I it may be you wou'd be asham'd your self,
Monseur mon Oncle, of the great Train you wou'd
get to wait upon your Spanish Hose, puh --the Boys
wou'd follow you, and hoot at you (vert & bleu)
pardone my *Franch* Franchise, Monsiuer Mon Oncle."
(III,i,129-43)

Before this episode is over, Diego threatens to break off the match unless Paris gives up his French attire and manner for a "Spanish habit." The sartorial clash of Spain and France, the visual climax of the Diego-Paris conflict, was intended to be comical enough to allow Hippolita, Prue and Mrs. Caution, as the stage direction notes, to exit laughing.

The remaining entertainment is provided by scenes like the third dance lesson where Don Diego gives instructions to the dancing couple that to the lubricious minded Mrs. Caution are suggestive. This is an additional master's touch--having the double entendre uttered by an asexual within earshot of a lubricious protector of a virgin. The scene builds dramatic tension and humor as Caution cautions more and more, Diego encourages more and more, and the audience is treated to the spectacle of the dancing couple twirling about the stage, arm in arm, eye to eye:

Caut. Nay de' see how he squeezes her hand,
Brother, O the lewd Villain.

Don. Come, move, I say, and mind her not.

Caut. De' see again he took her by the bare Arm.

Don. Come, move on, she's mad.

Ger. One, two, and a Coupee.

Don. Come.

One, two, turn out your Toes.

Caut. There, there, he pinch'd her by the Thigh, will you suffer it?

Ger. One, two, three, and fall back.

Don. Fall back, fall back, back, some of you are forward enough to fall back.

Ger. Back, Madam.

Don. Fall back when he bids you, Hussie.

Caut. How! how! fall back, fall back, marry, but she shall not fall back when he bids her.

Don. I say she shall, Huswife, come.

Ger. She will, she will, I warrant you, Sir, if you won't be angry with her.

Caut. Do you know what he means by that now, you a *Spaniard*?

Don. How's that, I not a *Spaniard*? say such a word again.

Ger. Come forward, Madam, three steps again.

Caut. See, see, she squeezes his hand now, O the debauch'd Harletry!

Don. So, so, mind her not, she moves forward pretty well; but you must move as well backward as forward, or you'll never do any thing to purpose.
(III,i, 367-414)

Alternating farce and wit allows Wycherley to open Act V with a reversal of fortune. Paris tells Gerrard, whose match was all but Church-tied, that he has been the butt of Hippolita's joke. The result is a sword-swinging scene that is eventually interrupted by Hippolita who persuades Gerrard of her sincerity. With the entrance of Don Diego, who sees Gerrard kissing Hippolita's hand in an act of reconciliation, the emphasis shifts from comic deception to comic discovery and finally resolution. Once Diego decides that Gerrard is not really a dancing master, he feels that his daughter's actions have dishonored the family. Diego laments the disgrace done to the "Grave, Wise, Noble, Honourable, Illustrious, Puissant, and right

Worshipful Family of the Formals (V,i,367-8), a lineage that Paris points out consists of a "Pin-maker," a Felt-maker," a "wine-cooper," and a "Vintner." Diego and Caution, as accomplices, are the first of the group to get their due, paying the price for jailing Hippolita. Shortly thereafter, Paris gets a match with Flirt, a travesty of the natural man-woman relationship that the union of Hippolita and Gerrard represents.

We could go and look at other major scenes that function predominantly as set pieces, and secondarily as parts of an integrated whole. But the point is clear -- the scenes of spectacle lend variety to the wit plot's progress. Wycherley wrote his play for the theater, and filled it with more spectacle than any of his other plays. In one sense he corrected a weakness of *Love in a Wood*, which had three strands of action, by limiting the action to a dominant single plot line, and multiplying the stage activity by alternating scenes of romance with those of farce.

III

The Gentleman Dancing-Master: An Assessment

It is generally agreed that Wycherley is examining at least three kinds of love relationships -- one that is initially prearranged and materialistic (Hippolita and Paris), one that is finally sincere (Hippolita and Gerrard), and one that is concupiscent and profane (Paris and Flirt). There is some disagreement, however, about the central action of the play, the love match of Hippolita and Gerrard. Some like Perry believe that all Hippolita

"wants is a man (she doesn't much care who),"³² as long as he is wittier than Paris, and this is her initial position. Dobree, for one, feels that Wycherley disliked Hippolita because "she has the desires natural to an animal."³³ Hippolita is clearly the most interesting character in the play because she is the most complex. Hippolita is sincere and dissembling, audacious and circumspect. She is both witty and innocent, "naturally modest" but part of a world, where as Don Diego observes, women are simply men in women's clothing. Wycherley was taking the conventional Restoration male lead's characteristics of wit, repartee, sensuality, and giving them to a young woman.

Her free and natural desires are prominently positioned in the opening scene where she tells Prue that shutting up a girl even at the age of fourteen, "To confine a Woman just in her rambling age ! [to] take away her liberty at the very time she shou'd use it," is the act of a "barbarous Aunt" and an "Unnatural Father!" Immediately we know that she will rebel in the face of what she feels are unnatural restraints. The reality is that the natural inclinations of a man belong to a woman, and that she has an aggressive scheme for exercising her free choice. It is she who gets Paris to bring Gerrard to her room. When Diego and Caution discover Hippolita with Gerrard early in act II, it is she who tells Gerrard to lead her about "as

³²Henry Ten Eyck Perry, *The Comic Spirit in Restoration Drama: Studies in the Comedies of Etherege, Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), p. 38.

³³Dobree, *Restoration Comedy*, p. 85.

if you lead me a Corant." When Diego draws his sword to satisfy his severe Spanish manner, it is Hippolita who interrupts with "... what will you kill my poor Dancing-master" Gerrard cannot help but react: "so much Wit and Innocency were never together before" (II,i, 279).

It is Hippolita's wit that has increased his love for her, "I wish I had not had this occasion of admiring thy Wit; I have increased my Love, whilst I have lost my hopes" (II,i,296-97). And it is this type of behavior that characterizes the match throughout the play. When she is told to dance with Gerrard who cannot dance, she immediately takes over to protect their scheme (II,i,419). Later, when Gerrard is ordered play the fiddle which he also cannot do, it is her ingenuity that keeps them from being discovered. Like Horner, Hippolita is Machiavellian,³⁴ she will do whatever it takes to earn her freedom from Paris to enjoy this "free frolic age." In this case she makes the rules and devises the intrigues and the challenges to defeat Caution and her father. When it comes to her relations with Diego, with Caution, with Paris, and initially with Gerrard, she remains in control. And it is the farcical activity, primarily her manipulation of the dancing instruction and the dancing-master, that allows her to stand out as a character in control. At the end of the play, Hippolita is triumphant, as she said she would be. After her father promises all of his wealth to the couple, she gives him her blessing in an ironic reversal, and describes him as a "good complaisant Father, indeed" (V,i,705).

³⁴Birdsall, *Wild Civility*, p. 126.

Wycherley's point, made more obvious by the static nature of the farcical and humorous characters, is that Hippolita has progressed from youth and spontaneity to a more mature, realistic assessment of her part in a relationship. The audience favored her because she deserves better than what her father had planned for her, and because she has the character to take her fortune into her own hands. We delight in her success because she is acting on the knowledge of self, and is more right about herself than others are about her. And as Flirt's epilogue makes clear, it is in Hippolita that we see the truth of the remark that the dramatic "art [of the Restoration] reflected the taste rather than the life of the time."³⁵

It has been argued that Restoration comedies "are not problem plays, but comedies."³⁶ While I would not be comfortable making such a statement for all Restoration comedies, I do think it applies to *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*. Simply stated the play really involves depictions of two main ideas: one having to do with naturalness and unnaturalness in people and their relationships (Paris and Flirt, Hippolita and Gerrard, Mrs. Caution), and the other with excesses in behavior (Diego and Paris).³⁷ Wycherley knew that his depiction of a strong independent woman of

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 125.

³⁶Elmer Edgar Stoll, "The *Beau Monde* at the Restoration," *MLN*, 49 (1934), p. 428.

³⁷Here I use the word "theme" to mean a subject, problem, or proposition that is always an abstraction. See Richard Levin, "Some Second Thoughts on Central Themes," *MLR*, 67 (1972), pp. 1-10.

fourteen was not what the fashionable town expected, though it is probably not unfair to say that most of those who made up the changing, heterogeneous audience in 1672 would have found Hippolita of interest. The view of marriage most prevalent in 1672 was the view that held that marriage was more or less a business arrangement. As P. F. Vernon explains the "increasingly sordid nature of marriage arrangements in real life conflicted violently with this ideal conception [Platonic love] of the meaning of marriage."³⁸ As we saw in *Love in a Wood*, the romantics in the world of William Wycherley would have supported a woman who gives herself and her fortune away in exchange for a meaningful marriage commitment, and would have revered her in place of one that held out only for separate maintenance.

The marriage of Gerrard and Hippolita is simply a depiction of a relationship built upon a foundation of trust and mutual respect. As in *Love in A Wood*, "The end of Marriage now is Liberty/And two are bound to set each other free." As such it cannot escape comparison with the relationship proposed by Don Diego and the one agreed to by Paris and Flirt that is built upon nothing but sexual love and material commitments. As Wycherley wrote "let Marriage, and forc'd Contracts only Joyn/those that exchange not Hearts, but truck for Coin."

³⁸P.F. Vernon, "Marriage of Convenience and the Moral Code of Restoration Comedy," *EIC*, 12 (1962), p. 374.

The Gentleman Dancing-Master has "moral merit"³⁹ though no profound moral purpose. *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* illustrates that Wycherley was in control of his craft and was using his skills to fashion a funny and instructive experience for the audience. To this end he made use of a variety of technical devices. In *Love in a Wood* we saw his skill at sex comedy, humours characters, comic dialogue, and timing. Most of these are again evident in large doses, along with some new techniques, like the extensive use of the aside, most probably necessitated by the thin plotting.

Added to the spectacle of dance and sword play are the sexual scenes and scenes of double entendre that are characteristically Wycherley. The scene between Prue and Monsieur (IV,i), for instance, is character revealing and funny without being obscene. It begins with Prue all but undressing Paris because she is tired of sitting in the foyer waiting while her lady gets satisfaction. Coming as it does late in the play it is another opportunity for Monsieur to prove that it does not matter who he is with, he is almost always the fool:

Mons. Art thou there, and so pensive? what art thou
thinking of?

Pru. Indeed I am ashamed to tell your Worship.

.

Mons. I will know it, speak.

Pru. Why then methoughts last night you came up into my
Chamber in your Shirt, when I was in Bed, and that
you might easily do; for I have ne're a Lock to
my door: now I warrant I am as red as my
Petticoat.

. . .

Mons. Ay, ay; but let's hear the Dream out.

Pru. Why, can't you guess the rest now?

³⁹Dobree, *Restoration Comedy*, p. 83.

Mons. No not I, I vow and swear, come let's hear.

Pru. But can't you guess in earnest.

Mons. Not I, the Devil et me.

Pru. Not guess yet! why then methoughts you came to
bed to me? Now am I as read as my Petticoat
again.

Mons. Ha, ha, ha, well, and what then? ha, ha, ha.

Pru. Nay, now I know by your Worship's laughing, you
guess what you did; I'm sure I cry'd out, and
wak'd all in tears, with these words in my mouth,
You have undone me, you have undone me! your
Worship has undone me.

Mons. Hah, ha, ha; but you wak'd and found it was but
a Dream.

Pru. Indeed it was so lively, I know not whether 'twas
a Dream or no; but if you were not there, I'll
undertake you may come when you will, and do any
thing to me you will, I sleep so fast.

Mons. No, no, I don't believe that.

Pru. Indeed you may, your Worship--

Mons. It cannot be.

Pru. Insensible Beast! he will not understand me yet,
and one wou'd think I speak plain enough. [aside]
(IV,i,222-23, 244-71)

It is because of passages like this in *The Country Wife* that has motivated some to term Wycherley a profligate. But the fact is that Wycherley is at his best in such passages where the comedy of the situation, usually in the revelation of character, always seems to overpower the bawdry.

This is not to suggest that Wycherley did not err in his visual comedy. The scene in Act V where the now-Spanish monsieur is being led about the stage by a blackamoor is completely without dramatic or comic relevance in that it neither offers any new insight into character, nor serves to move the action of the play along, nor does it entertain as a set piece today. It differs, therefore, from some of the other comic set pieces that have their origin in relevant dramatic action. If Wycherley is guilty of any excesses in this second play it is probably this kind of a scene for a scene's

sake, or as I believe, spectacle for the audience's sake. The fact that *Love in a Wood* is free of this kind of obvious superfluity suggests that its inclusion here was intentional.

Given the realities of a changing audience and a hodge-podge of theatrical options available to him, Wycherley's second play seems an appropriate mix of farce, satire, spectacle, music, sex and wit to be perfectly suited to the audience of its day, particularly a more city audience that was probably not ready for the Etheregian comedy. We have seen that the mixing of modes that characterized his first play could have resulted in an awful clutter in the hands of someone without Wycherley's talent. The simplicity in plotting, the lack of developed subplots, and the excessive farce could have made *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* a trifle if not for the skill of William Wycherley. Even with his unique touch it is the least successful of Wycherley's plays and of little more than historical interest to the study of Restoration comedy.

Wycherley's first attempt at theater was a limited success because it had too much of what was common for the theater. The result, a crowded but funny play, at least taught him that he needed more control over the elements of his drama. With *The Gentleman Dancing Master*, Wycherley carefully selected the vehicle for his comic satire, and further refined the dramatic skill that made his second play literally a farcical spectacle for the city audience he faced in 1671. At this time he was ready to bring this skill and experience to bear on *The Country Wife*.

CHAPTER IV

THE COUNTRY WIFE: NEW RULES FOR WITS

Unlike *Love in a Wood* and *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*, *The Country Wife* has consistently generated a large body of critical commentary. Like Restoration comedy in general, this critical commentary has become its own subject. So wide ranging are the interpretations that one scholar describes them as "almost ludicrous."¹ To some the play is a farce,² to others a comedy,³ and to still others a satire.⁴ In terms of subject matter, it is said to be a "manifesto on the virtues of sexual liberation,"⁵ a satire on

¹Hume, *The Development of Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century*, p. 97.

²John Palmer, *The Comedy of Manners* (London: Bell, 1913), p. 128.

³Fujimura, *Restoration Comedy of Wit*, pp. 117-55.

⁴Zimbardo, *Wycherley's Drama: A Link in the Development of English Satire*, and Virginia Ogden Birdsall, *Wild Civility: The English Comic Spirit on the Restoration Stage* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979).

⁵See Birdsall, *Wild Civility*, pp. 136 and 156.

jealousy,⁶ a satire on a hypocritical Hobbist society,⁷ and an investigation into the true nature of masculinity,⁸ to name just a few. Horner, the problematic lead character, has been described as a "wholly negative"⁹ character, as a "positive comic hero,"¹⁰ and as "chief actor."¹¹

Like the criticism of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, much contemporary criticism has been limited by its approach. Earlier critics asked moral questions, applied a moral standard, instead of a literary or theatrical one, and not surprisingly found Wycherley's drama "immoral." By stressing Wycherley's satiric stance and morality, twentieth century critics have attempted to rescue Wycherley from the literary lynchmen. Via formal considerations, as in the studies of Holland and Zimbardo, critics now point to the vices and follies lashed in the plays and the moral lessons offered to

⁶Harry Ten Eyck Perry, *The Comic Spirit in Restoration Drama: Studies in the Comedy of Etherege, Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh and Farquhar* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925), pp. 143 and 145.

⁷Charles A. Hallet, "The Hobbesian Substructure of *The Country Wife*," *PLL*, 9(1973), pp. 380-395.

⁸David M. Vieth, "Wycherley's *The Country Wife*: An Anatomy of Masculinity," *PLL*, 2 (1966), pp. 335-50.

⁹Righter, "William Wycherley," in *Restoration Theater*, ed. John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1965), p. 79.

¹⁰Birdsall, *Wild Civility*, p. 136.

¹¹Wallace Jackson, "*The Country Wife*: The Premises of Love and Lust," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 72(1973), p. 546.

the readers. Earlier critics wanted the plays to be moral treatises, and the twentieth century has in part fulfilled those desires. While there is little reason to view the plays of William Wycherley as nothing more than the lewd productions of a degenerate man and age, there is also little reason to view them primarily as vehicles for moral lessons.

What we have seen of Wycherley as a developing dramatist is testimony to the fact that he was a man of the theater, interested in entertaining and instructing his audience. His primary skill to 1675 was a dramatic one: he knew what to have his characters say, and when to have them say it. Because he was neither a moralist nor a philosopher, it is as comic drama that we must view *The Country Wife*.

I

Audience and Practice

In addition to the confidence created by his own developing literary skills, other forces were encouraging Wycherley's new approach to the theater. Between 1672, when *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* premiered, and 1675, the theater audience continued to change. By 1675, it completed its evolution from a predominantly aristocratic to a more heterogeneous group. The evidence suggests that by 1672 the relative proportions of city, town, and court were changing, with the town and court segments diminishing and the city interest growing. (See Chapter 1). With the evolution to a more representative audience, the formulaic responses to the audience's taste no longer played as significant a role as in the early 1660's

when the only two licensed groups had yet to establish identities and loyal followings for their respective dramatists and actor groups.

While competition remained a factor in the creation, selection and production of plays until the union of the two groups in 1682, enough of a dramatic history had been established by 1675 to allow for individual and creative expression. By the mid-seventies, playwrights began subordinating the predominant, conventional romantic plot lines in favor of more sexual plots lines. Between 1675 and 1677, for example, the Restoration audience was treated to *The Country Wife* (1675), *The Man of Mode* (1676), *The Virtuoso* (1676), *The Plain Dealer* (1676), and *The Rover* (1677), all comedies with pronounced sexual plots. Sexual comedy of this kind became so dominant that it fostered the creation of an anti-sex comedy, exemplified by Thomas Shadwell's *The Libertine* (1675), much in the same way that the vogue of heroic tragedies fostered the creation of Buckingham's *The Rehearsal*. By the late 1670's, the influence of the "ladies," who were distrubed by plays emphasizing female hypocrisy and sexuality, was also felt.

Wycherley's own early essays at the theater had served to sharpen his extraordinary natural flair for the dramatic, the comic, and the satiric, and to give him the confidence to deviate from the formulaic. By 1675 he was also familiar with the talents of the individuals who made up the King's Company, actors and actresses that had played roles in *Love in A Wood*. Given the experience of the two earlier plays, we could expect that Wycherley's third play would be an imitative, simple, interestingly plotted play, dealing with male and female relationships, of the witty, romantic and sexual variety. The execution would involve his and the period's standard

comic devices: the double entendre, the interesting satiric Jonsonian types (including Horner), frequent use of dramatic irony, mistaken identity, disguises, use of the aside to keep the audiences involved and attuned, and farcical elements. What we could not, however, predict is that these elements would gel in one of the great Restoration comedies.

It is by placing the play back into the context of the Restoration theater and Wycherley's dramatic career that we can narrow the range of discussion and avoid the ludicrous in interpretation. As Gerald Weales has noted, some of the interpretative problems have to do with most of Wycherley's critics being "oriented toward literature rather than the stage."¹² A prominent theater critic echoed this sentiment when he remarked at a 1924 production of *The Country Wife*, that "there is all the difference in the world between reading such a play as this and seeing it acted."¹³ Because Wycherley wrote for the stage we must distinguish between scenes as they are read and scenes as they were probably acted. It is by keeping in mind the conventions of Restoration comedy, Wycherley's practice, the available players, and by focusing on the play itself, that we can hope to narrow the range of discussion.

¹²Gerald Weales, ed., *The Complete Plays of William Wycherley* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1966), xvii.

¹³Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance*, p. 244.

II

Performance and the Play

The experience of *The Country Wife* is in many ways typical of Wycherley in that many of the characters and situations are easily understood. The humours types like the Fidgets and Sparkish, while entertaining and full of their own unique comic life, are by definition two dimensional. Some of the other characters, like Horner, Margery, Alithea, however, are at the center of the critical controversies surrounding the play. If we are to narrow the ludicrous range of opinion, we must come to some conclusions about how these characters are to be understood.

Like *Love in a Wood* and *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*, the opening scene introduces the plot and sets up the major conflict of Horner against his world. Wycherley's skillful handling of the exposition and staging involves the audience immediately. Given the size of the theater, Charles Hart's entrance as Horner was staged so close to the audience that he made immediate contact with it both physically and verbally.¹⁴ Hart, one of the leading actors of the day, was known for his ability to command attention in the acting of dominant roles. Thomas Rymer noted that "Mr. Hart *pleases*: most of the business falls to his share, and what he delivers every one takes upon content, their eyes are prepossesst and charm'd by his

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 23.

action."¹⁵ Wycherley gave him such an opportunity and the audience such an invitation.

In the process of the opening exchange with Quack, Horner's ruse is explained, and his initial world view presented to the audience for scrutiny and acceptance. This acceptance is important because it provides the frame of reference for Horner's reaction to his world. It is also important to our understanding of how Wycherley expects us to react to Horner. Wycherley fully expects his audience to identify with Horner and the apparent cleverness of his scheme, just as he expected the audience to identify early on with the scheme of Hippolita, and to discover the falseness of Lady Flippant's plans. At this point, we are interested now in whether or not his plan will work. The question as to whether or not the audience accepts Horner or admires Horner is not raised at this time. It is the test of this plan that attracts our interest and attention.

In a matter of a few lines, we know that Horner has had Quack pass the rumor about town that he is impotent, thereby giving up his reputation for virility for strategic reasons. What we know about Horner is important because it suggests the motivation for his scheme. He has been playing the cuckolding game for some time, and apparently according to the standard wit rules implied in Quack's reaction to this scheme. Quack is confused by this approach because he has been "hired by young Gallants to bely'em t'other way; but you are the first wou'd be thought a Man unfit for Women" (I,i,32-3). Horner has chosen a new method and enlisted Quack to

¹⁵Thomas Rymer, *Spingarn*, II, p. 184.

assist because to Horner the old wit way is a strategy for "Vain Rogues" who are "contented to be thought abler Men than they are." Success in the city will come only from a "new unpractised trick." It is apparent that Horner knows the way of his world and has a strategem designed to take advantage of it and to demonstrate his wit in the process.¹⁶ At this early stage everything invites the audience to throw in with Horner--accepting him as admirable not because of his charade but because of his honesty in recognizing the hypocrisy and affectation of his world. The Restoration audience was not asked to evaluate Horner's probity, but rather the cleverness of his plot for exposing hypocrisy in a new and witty way.

It is Horner's reaction to the entrance of his first guests that gives the audience all it needs to know concerning the character of the three: "No-this formal fool and women" (I,i,53). For the time being, Horner is our only guide, and as such we trustfully follow his directions. Horner has said that Jaspar, "a grave Man of business," and his clan are fools, and with comic anticipation we expect that their words and actions will provide ample evidence of this fact. Jaspar's affected formal greeting of Horner is the first indication that Horner is trustworthy as a commentator:

Jasp. My Coach breaking just now before your
door Sir, I look upon as an occasional
reprimand to me Sir, for not kissing
your hands Sir, since your coming out
of *France* Sir; and so my disaster Sir,

¹⁶See Arthur Freedman, "Impotence and Self Destruction in *The Country Wife*," *English Studies*, 53 (1972), pp. 421-31. Freedman argues that "Horner's putative impotency is symbolic of the impotency of Restoration society and its males."

has been my good fortune Sir; and
 this is my Wife, and Sister Sir.
 (I,i,55-9)

Horner's feigned aversion to greeting Lady Fidget, who has been thrust forward at Horner by her husband, is just the evidence that Jaspar is looking for. Jaspar gleefully addresses the audience in a chuckling aside: "So the report is true, I find by his coldness or aversion to the Sex; but I'll play the wag with him"(I,i,67-8). Jaspar assumes a conspiracy with the audience unknowing that the audience is already engaged in a conspiracy with his rival. Jaspar's motivation for the visit is to abuse Horner, and to find an "innocent diversion for [his] wife. . . to hinder her unlawful pleasures"(I,i,118-19). Horner's motivation for the rude and actually very harsh treatment of the Fidget women and his mimickry of Jaspar's affected formality is to lend credibility to the rumor. Jaspar's conclusion that Horner "hates Women perfectly" testifies to Horner's success.

While Lady Fidget, who was played by Mary Knepp, is off center stage, possibly behind Jaspar, her facial expression no doubt included a look of revulsion. Afterall, Horner lacks the thing that she wants. When she asks her husband to take her away from this "base, rude Fellow," we are reminded of another of Wycherley's sensual woman, also acted by Knepp, Lady Flippant in *Love in a Wood*. This stage set-up, with Fidget distanced from Horner, the verbal insults and the facial grimace, are important to note, because by Act III when she knows Horner's secret we will see her embracing Horner, while exchanging steamy glances and words.

What we have been introduced to so far is all part of the wit game that has a newly constructed set of rules, Horner's rules. Before Sir Jaspar

exits to pursue his business, something that "must be preferr'd always before Love and Ceremony"(I,i,108), he extends the planned for invitation:

Jasp. Mr. Horner your servant, I shou'd be glad to see
 you at my house; pray, come and dine with me,
 and play at Cards with my Wife after dinner, you
 are fit for Women at that game yet; hah,ha---
 ['Tis as much a Husbands prudence to provide
 innocent diversion for a Wife, as to hinder her unlawful
 pleasures; and he had better employ her, than let her employ
 herself]. *Aside.* (I,i,114-20)

Jaspar thinks he will be free to go about his pleasure which is business and substitute for his company a harmless eunuch. The audience expects that Horner's plan will work because it exploits men like Jaspar who place pleasure in the company of their women second behind pleasures of other sorts. Wycherley is extending an invitation to his audience to join in with Horner and to see the world with his vision.

Moreover, unlike other wit games, Horner's ruse is for his benefit only. It is interesting to note that in a play that makes much mention of male friendship, Horner never takes advantage of any of the opportunities he has to bring his friends into his confidence. He plays along with the rumors that circulate in Town, and in fact misguides the wits by downplaying his impotency and exaggerating his dislike for the opposite sex. He separates friendship with men, which he calls "lasting rational and manly pleasures"(I,i,192-93), from his witty ruse. It will be important when we look at the character of Horner that we accept his complexity, one side

as a false eunuch in his relations with women, and one as a witty friend to man and nature when he is simply Harry Horner.¹⁷

The positive response of the audience to Horner is reinforced by the arrival of Horner's second guest, Sparkish, who is announced by a boy, a practical comic device which enables those on stage the opportunity to comment on a new character for the audience's benefit. In this case the very name Sparkish, "a young man of foppish character," would have provided at least the first clue. To reinforce the impression left by the name and for amusement, the wits one by one offer disparaging remarks about Sparkish, whose chief fault is that "his opinion of himself is so great" that by "being in the Company of Men of sense wou'd pass for one" (I,i, 230-31).

At the mention of his name, Sparkish, here played by Joe Haines who played the part of Lord Plausible in *The Plain Dealer*, was accepted as a fool by the Restoration audience much in the same way that Dapperwit would have been. Then, as well as for readers today, the characters of many Restoration comedies are offered as either primarily or fully truewits, witwoulds, or witlesses, who the audience either likes or dislikes almost immediately.¹⁸ That is not to say, however, that occasionally characters did

¹⁷Berman, "The Ethics of *The Country Wife*," p. 48. Berman, who discusses the role of friendship in the play, argues that the picture of a world largely corrupt provides justification for Horner's actions and therefore makes him more the hero than the object of ridicule.

¹⁸Wilkinson, *The Comedy of Habit*, p. 135. Wilkinson, and others, have established that the players and the audience recognized this hierarchy.

not take on a life beyond the two dimensional nature of their initial conception. As has been demonstrated in earlier discussion, though, it is safe to say that with Wycherley our first impression of all of the secondary characters and even many of the major characters is the lasting and dominant impression.

In addition to the relation of an anecdote without much of a punchline, Sparkish is confirmed as "one of those naseous offers at wit" (I,i,227-28) by the farcical shoving he receives at the hands of Horner and his fellow wits, Harcourt and Dorilant. His almost immediate return after literally being pushed off the stage by the wits further demonstrates the truth of Harcourt's earlier remark that "tis a very hard thing to be rid of him"(I,i,227). As if it was not enough to be called the fool and to have that confirmed, Wycherley gives him the opportunity to indict himself by returning to say, "But, Sparks, pray hear me; what d'ye think I'll eat then with gay shallow Fops, and silent Coxcombs? I thinks wit as necessary at dinner as a glass of good wine, and that's the reason I never have any stomach when I eat alone"(I,i,311-14). He remains unaware here and throughout the play of the disparity between what he means and what others understand him to say. He is so concerned with appearing witty to the world, as Jaspar is to be about his business, that later he leaves his fiance with Harcourt to go to the new play to demonstrate that he has wit by sitting in "wits row." The course of the play demonstrates the static nature of Sparkish.

To maintain audience interest during the lengthy exposition and introduction of the major characters, and to lend a variety of support to his

characterization of Horner as a man whose judgment of others we can trust, Wycherley skillfully moves characters on and off the stage rather quickly. They finish their business and make way for the next one. And so after Jaspar and his entourage and Sparkish, Pinchwife enters, but unlike the Fidgets and Sparkish, he is not introduced. We are left to determine how we will react to him without coaching. At this point we do not know why he is visiting Horner, but Horner's salutation is telling: "Well, Jack, by thy long absence from the Town, the grumness of thy countenance, and the slovenlyness of thy habit; I shou'd give thee joy, shou'd I not, of Marriage?"(I,i,328-30). Pinchwife's visit to town has been necessitated both by legal matters and the impending marriage of his sister to Sparkish. His evasive response to Horner, and his direct address of the audience, indicate that he wants neither the world nor Horner to know that he is married. The reason for this the audience can surely guess. This introduction, like that of Sir Jaspar, suggests the obvious comic conflict and inevitable resolution adumbrated by Horner's remark to Pinchwife that "the next thing that is to be heard, is thou'rt a Cuckold"(I,i,341-2).

Like the introduction of Sparkish, the introduction of Pinchwife is accompanied by comic overtones. First the audience would have viewed the entrance of Mr. Mohun, Dapperwit in *Love in a Wood*, and the introduction of the extremes to which Pinchwife has gone to prevent cuckolding, as a sure indication that Pinchwife was a comic character. Second, and more important, Pinchwife's whole situation is comical. He has already put himself on a course of self-destruction by jailing his wife who in her ignorance does not know better. His motivation for the marriage also

suggests that horns will finally be his due: When Horner asks why he would marry someone who he has described as "ugly, ill-bred, and silly" unless she were also rich, Pinchwife explains:

Pin. As rich as if she brought me twenty thousand pound out of this Town; for she'l be as sure not to spend her moderate portion, as a *London* baggage wou'd be to spend hers, let it be what it wou'd; so 'tis all one: then because she's ugly, she's the likelier to be my own; and being ill-bred, she'll hate conversation; and since silly and innocent, will not know the difference betwixt a Man of one and twenty, and one of forty--

Hor. Nine--to my knowledge; but if she be silly, she'l expect as much from a Man of forty nine, as from him of one and twenty: But methinks wit is more necessary than beauty, and I think no young Woman ugly that has it, and no handsome Woman agreeable without it.

Pin. 'Tis my maxime, he's a Fool that marrys, but he's a greater that does not marry a Fool; what is wit in a Wife good for, but to make a Man a Cuckold.

Hor. No, but she'l club with a Man that can; and what is worse, if she cannot make the Husband a Cuckold, she'l make him jealous, and pass for one, and then 'tis all one.

Pin. Well, well, I'll take care for one, my Wife shall make me no Cuckold, though she had your help Mr. Horner; I understand the Town, Sir.
(I,i, 378-400)

Pinchwife's determined declaration that not even Horner will cuckold him sets up the audience's interest in the conflict that will have as its central action Pinchwife's attempts to prevent Horner from presenting him with horns. He may appear "grum," and later we will find him violent in language and threatening in action, but this brutality is consistently undercut by either the comedy of an unexpected turn of events, or the ingenuousness of Margery. Additionally, the fact that Horner prefers a

woman of wit to one of beauty and that Pinchwife prefers a fool puts us squarely on Horner's side.

At the end of Act One we have met all the male characters,¹⁹ been introduced to Horner's plot, and discovered the primary motivations of two of the plays important characters, Horner and Pinchwife. Those critics who find Horner a despicable hypocrite would be hard pressed to find evidence in Act one of that fact. It is true that he does initiate a rumor that he believes will help rid him of unwanted mistresses and help him secure new ones, but that is just part of being witty in a world where reputation is synonymous with honor. Furthermore, what some believe to be an expression of Wycherley's cynicism is really an expression of a truth that the inhabitants of his world have testified to on his behalf.

The exposition continues in Act II with the introduction of two female characters, Alithea, Pinchwife's sister, played by Mrs. James, a tall, slender woman who played a variety of secondary roles throughout her career including the part of Isabella, the lady in waiting, in *Love in a Wood*; and Margery Pinchwife, the country wife of the title, a part acted by Mrs. Boutel, who played the parts of Christina in *Love in a Wood*, and Fidelia, also a breeches part, in *The Plain Dealer*. Now that we have met Mr. Pinchwife, Margery's entrance to the stage is under the eavesdropping eye

¹⁹Freedman notes the predominance of male roles and suggests that that the play is about the "self destructive impotence, neglectfulness, and ineptitude of the Restoration male whose representative sign is the eunuch." See "Impotence and Self-Destruction in *The Country Wife*," pp. 421-31.

of her mistrusting, ever jealous husband,²⁰ who the stage direction says is seen "*peeping behind at the door*," his presence unknown to the two women. The inexperienced Margery is locked in the house while in London because of Pinchwife's desire to keep her ignorant and because of his jealousy, an emotion with which she in her innocence is unfamiliar. In addition to having her movements restricted since coming to London, she has also noticed a difference in her husband, who is so glum since his arrival in the city. At this point, she is truly a comic country wife, interested in taking simple country pleasures like a walk in the woods. Margery's innocence here is set off against the experience of Alithea. We can imagine that this distinction has been made obvious by both her country costume and her country diction.

For Margery the world is simply an extension of her country habitat. Margery's desire to walk in the woods for entertainment, for example, seems a drudgery to Alithea. And while Margery's language is almost exclusively innocent and honest, it does contain comic double meanings that betray simultaneously her innocence and the worldliness of those around her. Just as Pinchwife makes his entrance to the stage, for instance, Margery says that her husband will not let her abroad "for fear of catching the Pox"; the more worldly Alithea sees the irony and lets her know that she should qualify that statement in polite conversation with the

²⁰Freedman argues that Pinchwife's jealousy is motivated by his sexual insecurity, p. 425. This may supply the motivation for his visit to Horner in the first place. Confronting his opponent would be in keeping with his tendency to do exactly the thing he should not do in his attempts to prevent his cuckolding.

word "small." At this point, we anticipate the influence Alithea will have on Margery as concerns her coming to knowledge of the town.

And so with all that as preface, we witness the innocent country girl greet her old whoremaster husband with "Oh my dear, dear Bud, welcome home." The audience knows that Pinchwife is returning from his meeting with Horner, and that his eavesdropping has exposed him to this wife's innocent improprieties. With an expression surely and gradually altered by all that he has heard, he storms onto the stage toward Margery who innocently asks, "why dost thou look so froppish, who hast nanger'd thee?"(II,i,33-4). The husband responds abruptly and viciously by calling her "a fool." This is enough to make Margery move aside and burst into tears. This action is cruel and insensitive and Margery's reaction enough for the audience to develop an increasingly stronger dislike of Pinchwife.

Alithea, who so far has shown herself to be a reasonable woman, and whose only censurer has been her brother, defends Mrs. Pinchwife and suggests that her brother is reacting in the extreme. In her role as the voice of moderation and confidant to the audience, Alithea points out in a reasoned manner that if Pinchwife, her brother, has a care for the honor of the family, he is probably more likely to have it tarnished by the actions of a wife who is treated like a prisoner, than he is by a sister who is free to take the innocent liberties of the town. The ensuing conversation that Pinchwife initiates by suggesting that Alithea would teach her impudence really ends up forcing the mention of many things that to Pinchwife's way of thinking are unmentionables. This is reminiscent of the comic scene in *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* where Diego and Caution supply explanations

that cover Gerrard's ruse as they argue about whose interrogation is more likely to expose Gerrard. In *The Country Wife*, this scene establishes a comic pattern that only worsens as Pinchwife gets more aggressive about sheltering his wife to protect his reputation:

Mr. Pin. Hark you Mistriss, do not talk so before
my Wife, the innocent liberty of the Town!

Alith. Why, pray, who boasts of any intrigue with
me? what Lampoon has made my name notorious?
what ill Women frequent my Lodgings? I keep
no Company of any Women of scandalous
reputations.

Mr. Pin. No, you keep the Men of scandalous
reputations Company.

Alith. Where? wou'd you not have me civil? answer
'em in a Box at the Plays? in the drawing
room at *Whitehal*? in *St. James's Park*?
Mulberry-garden? or--

Mr. Pin. Hold, hold, do not teach my Wife, where
the Men are to be found; I believe she's the
worse for your Town documents already; I bid
you keep her in ignorance as I do.

Pinchwife's continued dialogue with his wife will do nothing but cause him the very harm he has plotted to avoid. Alithea tips off the audience in what is probably an aside, a device used frequently by Wycherley to have a character point out the obvious and to encourage identification with the speaker as spokesperson: "The Fool has forbid me discovering to her the pleasures of the Town, and he is now setting her a gog upon them himself"(II,i,82-3). Without thinking carefully, Pinchwife remarks that the theater is no place for her because one of the lowliest fellows in the town who saw her yesterday says he loves her. Margery of course wants to know more. All of this is spoken to the amusement and laughter of Alithea(II,i,121), who early in the act represents a sensible point

of view and at least one that Wycherley subscribed to for it has as its basis common sense. At this point the audience has accepted her as a reliable contact inside the world of the play, and she has reinforced Pinchwife's comic stupidity. In a way this sets up the problem that some critics have with Alithea when they see her loyalty to Sparkish. But like *Love in a Wood*, we have characters in *The Country Wife* that inhabit two different worlds: the Fidgets, Harcourt and Pinchwives a more realistic world, and Alithea a more idealistic world at least as concerns her relationship with Sparkish.

Wycherley demonstrates his skill at controlling the tempo of the action by having Harcourt and Sparkish enter, while Margery exits to the shoving of her husband. If not for her innocence and Pinchwife's silliness, this could pass for physical brutality, but it is really nothing more than physical humor that Wycherley is conscious of keeping comic. One way to subordinate the brutality of Pinchwife's violence was to shift from the heaviness of the scene in question to one made lighter in tone by the presence of Sparkish who boasts that he was in fact as good as his word for having brought his fiance acquainted with the wits of the town. Like Dapperwit in *Love in a Wood* and Paris in *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*, it is really to show his own wit that he foolishly does everything he does, from introducing a rival, to sitting in wits row, to dining with earls. When Sparkish asks Harcourt how he likes Alithea, Harcourt as wit responds ironically with "So infinitely well, that I cou'd wish I had a Mistriss too, that might differ from her in nothing, but her love and engagement to you"(II,i,145-7). To the utter dismay of Pinchwife, Sparkish continues to

push his friend on his finance, "Praising another man to his Mistriss" (II,i, 154).

In predictable fashion, Sparkish pushes Harcourt, played by the handsome Edward Knyaston, and Alithea off into the corner and asks Harcourt to ascertain if she has wit for "if a Woman wants wit in a corner, she has it no where"(II,i,198-9). Our interest is in what we can see is a developing attraction. Alithea, unlike the more aggressive Hippolita, expresses her concern for Sparkish's obviously foolish behavior by saying, "Sir, you dispose of me a little before your time"(II, i,200). Some critics think that Alithea knows Sparkish to be a fool,²¹ but that she feels that her reputation will suffer if she breaks off the match. It is no where made clear that she believes Sparkish to be the fool that he is. In fact she remains steadfast in her insistence that she must marry Sparkish because she is honor-bound by her promise. At this point in the action Alithea's reputation is inextricably woven with her sense of what is right and proper. She has what Sparkish calls commitment, and because she believes it proceeds from esteem she shall have him. Unlike Fidget and her friends, we know that it is not only worldly reputation with which Alithea is concerned, because as Harcourt points out, her reputation will suffer if she marries Sparkish for the world is almost unanimous in its opinion that he is an idiot and a coward.

²¹See Righter who says that "Alithea is painfully aware of the shortcoming of her future husband", though she offers no textual evidence in support (p. 77). Also see Chadwick, who believes that by Act III Alithea has "... no illusions about the foolishness of the man she is about to marry," p. 96.

In the final analysis the fact is that the secondary role of Alitheia would not have invited the close scrutiny in a Restoration production that modern textual critics have employed because of the audience's acceptance of her idealistic notion of honor, the reality that Restoration marriages were arranged unions, and the disparity that exists between Alitheia and Fidget for thematic purposes. The betrothal to Sparkish is something that would have been accepted as belonging to the world that Wycherley has created.

In spite of Alitheia's promise to Sparkish, however, she admits that "I must not let'em kill the Gentleman neither, for his kindness to me;" (II,i,280-1). This is the first indication that she finds Harcourt desirable, "I am so far from hating him, that I wish my Gallant had his person and understanding"(II,i, 281). Though she does not express any significant displeasure with Sparkish, Alitheia makes clear her obvious awareness of some of Sparkish's intellectual limitations.

After Sparkish, Alitheia and Harcourt exit, Lady Fidget and her entourage enter to attempt to free Margery from the clutches of Pinchwife so that she may accompany them to the play. Their discussion of the sexual mores of the time further emphasizes their status as the neglected bounty that Horner has set his sights on anew. For these women, so protective of their honor, it is shameful that men of equal standing would think to lie with someone from a lower class when ladies of honor are available. The fact that "'tis not an injury to a Husband, till it be an injury to our honours; so that a Woman of honour looses no honour with a private Person," (II,i,384-6) makes ladies of quality, of rank, or birth, worth visiting.

Dorilant no doubt casts a surprised look as he asks Horner, "what a Divel are these?" (II,i,416). The whole discussion serves to demonstrate that at least Lady Fidget has elastic morals, stretched enough to allow for a tryst with Horner, something that Dainty and Squeamish suspect: "So the little fellow is grown a private person--with her--"(II,i,388-9) [said apart to Squeamish]. Based on what the three say, there is a marked moral difference between the "little Play-house Creatures" and "Women of understanding, great acquaintance, and good quality"(II,i,344-5) though the truth be known there is none. The only real difference is societal rank and the pretensions that cause the ladies of "honor" to protect their reputation without cause for real honor more than the "little Play-house creatures." It is this significant difference that Horner has also noticed, and that the other wits of the play, Harcourt and Dorilant, have not, and it is this difference that dictates Horner's *modus operandi*.

Horner has made the same distinction between vizards and ladies of quality that these ladies make. The apparent sense of honor is understood by some to be real honor but Horner knows that it is not, "Virtue is your greatest Affectation." For the ladies a wit is a man with whom she is sure to lose her reputation, and therefore her honor. Horner knows them for what they really are, and explains to Dorilant that they "are pretenders to honour, as criticks to wit, only by censuring others; and as every raw peevish, out-of-humou'd, affected, dull, Tea-drinking, Arithmetical Fop sets up for a wit, by railing at men of sence, so these for honour, by railing at the Court, and Ladies of as great honour, as quality"

(II,i, 417-421). This observation is the simple truth that his scheme capitalizes on.

Up to this point there has been no need to question whether Horner can act as spokesperson and judge. He remains the one character in whom we presently have the most confidence. The two dimensional Alithea stands in contrast to Lady Fidget, one whose sense of honor is real and one whose is false. Pinchwife and his wife are two comic characters, an innocent locked up in London and a fool trying to prevent cuckolding. Once all that Horner has said has been confirmed in front of our eyes, we accept his ruse as a satiric device that helps us gain entry to the place where masks are dropped and people are seen for what they really are.

The Restoration audience was engaged as Horner's confidant, just as Quack is. And throughout the production some of the other characters take the same audience into their confidence too. This is what is meant by Restoration comedy being a comedy of "non-illusion." According to Styan, "the activity on the stage is an extension of the activity in the audience," and "the audience accepted its own participatory role in the business of playmaking."²²

By the end of Act Two, no one enjoying the comedy is interested in judging Horner and everyone enjoying the comedy is anticipating some interesting conflicts. Given the satiric nature of the ruse, pretenders to wit, to honor, to marriage have been paraded by our satirist and exposed in conversation for their unnaturalness. The audience sides with Horner

²²Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance*, p. 11.

because he stands alone as the natural man, one who is not deceiving himself, the man of wit against a bevy of hypocrites who believe themselves superior in virtue and wit. The audience, aligned with Horner, judges the behavior of the pretenders to wit and virtue. Because of the alignment though Horner stands outside the realm of Wycherley's satire.

Act Three opens as did Act Two, with Margery and Alithea discussing her marital situation, though this time Margery is expressing a more aggressive interest in London life. In contrast to the earlier act when Margery was innocently inquiring about the location of the woods, she now feels "like a poor lonely, sullen Bird" who is doomed to watch Alithea "go every day fluttering abroad." Earlier Margery had told Pinchwife that she "hate[s] London; our Place-house in the Country is worth a thousand of't, wou'd I were there again" (II,i,61-2). Even though she has been married at a young age, and has not enjoyed freedoms, her husband's description of the London ladies life, of "love plays, visits, fine coaches, fine clothes, fiddles, balls, treats," has her interest piqued and her feelings depressed. It is just after blaming Pinchwife for the way she feels, that he enters and accuses Alithea of putting town longings in her head. The audience, who has been following Mr. Pinchwife's comically growing culpability for building the interest in London life in the mind of Margery, knows who is guilty. The more Pinchwife mentions London life, the more he is forced to play the part of jailer, and the more Margery feels jailed, the greater her desire for freedom---freedom to see the town and freedom from her husband.

The possibility that Pinchwife will leave for the country hornless is short-lived for Margery lets him know that she would like to take the

pleasures of the town more than she cares about returning home to the country. She asks to go to a play "to look upon the Player-men, and . . . see, if I cou'd, the Gallant you say loves me"(III,i,59-60). The whole scene illustrates a change in the character of Margery, who has developed a new aggressiveness evident in her response to his denial of her request: "Nay, I will go abroad, that's once" (III, 1,69). At the same time, this scene reinforces the picture of Pinchwife as a comic character, who even fate is determined to undermine: "So! The obstinacy already of a Town-wife" (III,i,85), he notes. To meet the audience's expectations, the demands of the plot, and to reinforce Pinchwife's comic characterization, Wycherley has Pinchwife take Margery to the New Exchange dressed in breeches disguised as her own brother, Sir James. Even though there is a beastliness about Pinchwife, what else but comic describes a character who moves with each action one step closer to personally bringing his wife to a rival's bed. Some might argue that this is more a function of plotting than character, but given the static nature of humours characters in Restoration comedy, and Pinchwife's culpability to this point, this is clearly an attempt to reinforce his comic dimensions.

Our anticipation of Margery's entrance in breeches at the New Exchange is greater for seeing the next scene open with the three wits on stage, with Horner as satirist at least figuratively at center stage. Wycherley then times Sparkish's entrance perfectly, having him come on stage just after Harcourt asks Horner how he might win Alithea. Horner supplies the credo that has inspired his own plan: "here comes one will help you to her" for "a foolish Rival, and a jealous Husband assist their Rivals

designs; for they are sure to make their Woman hate them, which is the first step to their love, for another Man" (III,ii,52-54). In a single breath, Horner has indicted Jaspar, Pinchwife and Sparkish as really creators of their own problems something the audience accepts from Horner as Wycherley's own point of view on his fools.

To this group enter Pinchwife and Margery, Mary Knepp in breeches, and Lucy, her maid. For interest's sake, Wycherley kept his two actions apart. The separation enables the audience to watch fools representing two extremes: Sparkish who is shortly to be wed, is trying to avoid his fiancee, and in the process brings her closer to Harcourt. Sparkish's words and actions here, and throughout, are not motivated by trust, one of the touchstones of a good relationship, but really a lack of serious interest in the person of Alithea. A match to Sparkish would be testimony of a woman's assessment of his true wit. Pinchwife, meanwhile, is bringing his wife to the center of London life that he has worked so hard to shield her from, and closer to the man he most fears will cuckold him. Both are setting themselves up to receive their due and the audience anxiously and comically anticipates it.

The juxtaposition on stage of these two pairs of contraries, one dominated by excessive jealousy and one by apparent lack of meaningful interest, allows Wycherley to alternate to Pinchwife who is expressing his concern for Margery's presence at the New Exchange because it is full of cuckolds and cuckold makers. Pinchwife wants to leave, but the innocent Margery, who is getting more experienced with each passing minute, says ironically that "she hasn't had half her belly ful." It is at this point that

Wycherley exploits the farce, irony, and steaminess of Knepp's breeches role for his audience.

After a study of breeches scenes, a theater historian concludes that the one involving Margery in *The Country Wife* may be the cleverest in all of Restoration comedy: "It has the virtues of an inverted game of hide-and-seek, since instead of having the female deceive the male, the male pretends ignorance of the truth while the female in breeches only half-heartedly tries to deceive him."²³ Because she was an accomplished actress we can hypothesize that Mary Knepp would have exploited her disguise by trying half-heartedly to deceive Horner as her jealous husband looks on. The audience would have delighted in watching Horner use a series of "tricks" to test his new acquaintance.²⁴ Predictably, Pinchwife has gotten himself into a comical predicament. Margery cannot act like a woman without betraying the disguise, but Pinchwife cannot endure the handling she is getting from Horner, who kisses her while asking Pinchwife to allow "him" to stay and enjoy the pleasure of the town.

When Horner notices a similarity between the brother and the woman he fell in love with at the playhouse, Mrs. Pinchwife discovers the identity of the gallant that her husband had previously refused to identify. Now that the fine gentleman is before her, she expresses her excitement about the wit play she is involved in by telling the audience in an aside, "I

²³*Ibid.*, pp. 139-40.

²⁴See Styan for a lengthy discussion about the production aspects of this scene(p. 141).

love him already too."(III,ii,394). Pinchwife lets the audience know that he sees what is happening by remarking "how she gazes upon him." These gazes we can assume have nothing to do with real love, and have everything to do with the excitement of the London chase that is part of the witty life.

The climax of the scene, like many in Wycherley, involves the irony of Horner giving the supposed brother a message to take to his sister, a message containing statements of his love for her. From Horner's kiss she is spun to Harcourt and Dorilant for further kissing. The frustrated Pinchwife, who is made more laughable with each new scene, is helpless to do anything but look on. After countless attempts to preserve his forehead, he admits to the audience what it already knows, that he is "upon a wrack" (III,ii,418).

Sparkish, Harcourt, Alithea, and Lucy helped to maintain the quick pacing of Act III with their earlier interaction surrounding Sparkish's continued importuning of his fiance to be reconciled to his rival. As far as Sparkish is concerned he is trying to reconcile his fiance to a friend; his fiance, on the other hand, is trying to suggest that Harcourt is no friend at all; and Harcourt is proving that to be true. Sparkish believes that he is acting the part of a wit by failing to believe that what he hears is really what he hears. All the while Wycherley manipulates Sparkish by having Alithea encourage him to show jealousy, the expression of which is the very thing that will finally cause his loss of favor with Alithea. For even though Alithea expects to see jealousy here, it is an emotion that she also claims to loathe:

Alith. You astonish me, Sir, with you want of
jealousie.

Spar. And you make me guiddy, Madam, with your
jealousie, and dears, and virtue, and honour;
gad, I see virtue makes a Woman as
troublesome, as a little reading, or
learning.

Alith. Monstrous!
(III,ii, 228-32)

As a wit, Harcourt knows when the time is right, and he expresses both his love and his incredulity about her commitment to such a inconsiderable thing as Sparkish. The fact that Sparkish does not understand what he is participating in demonstrates humorously Horner's continued reliability, and that a rival is the best way to his mistress:

Spar. . . . Friend, do you love my Mistriss here?

Har. Yes I wish she would not doubt it.

Spar. But how do you love her?

Har. With all my Soul.

Alith. I thank him, methinks he speaks plain enough
now.

Spar. You are out still. [to Alitheia]

But with what kind of love, Harcourt?

Har. With the best, and truest love in the World.

Spar. Look you there then, that is with no
matrimonial love, I'm sure.

Alith. How's that, do you say matrimonial love is
not best?

Spar. Gad, I went too far e're I was aware. But
speak for thy self Harcourt, you said you
wou'd not wrong me, nor her.

Har. No, no, Madam, e'n take him for Heaven's sake.

Spar. Look you there, Madam.

Har. Who shou'd in all justice be yours, [Claps his
he that loves you most. hand on his
breast]

Alith. Look you there, Mr. Sparkish, who's that?

Spar. Who shou'd it be? go on Harcourt.

Har. Who loves you more than Women, Titles, or
fortune Fools. [Points at Sparkish]

Spar. Look you there, he means me stil, for he
points at me.

Alith. Ridiculous!

Har. Who can only match your Faith, and constancy
in love.

Spar. Ay.

Har. Who knows, if it be possible, how to value so
much beauty and virtue.

Spar. Ay.

Har. Whose love can no more be equall'd in the
world, than that Heavenly form of yours.

Spar. No---

Har. Who cou'd no more suffer a Rival, than your
absence, and yet cou'd no more suspect your
virtue, than his own constancy in his love to
you.

Spar. No--

Har. Who in fine loves you better than his eyes,
that first made him love you.

Spar. Ay---nay, Madam, faith you shan't go, till---

Alith. Have a care, lest you make me stay too long-

Spar. But till he has saluted you; that I may be
assur'd you are friends, after his honest
advice and declaration: Come pray, Madam, be
friends with him.

(III,ii, 278-320)

Clearly as Horner has said, this is a world of inverted values where the best way to a woman is through her man. By the end of Act III we have ample evidence to support this assessment. Sir Jaspar seeks out Horner to keep his wife company. Sparkish has encouraged Harcourt to become Alithea's friend all the way to the point of proposal. Pinchwife has had to suffer the torment of watching Horner kiss Margery, thereby illustrating the danger that attempting to prevent cuckolding by force presents. Alithea remains committed to Sparkish though jealousy and unfaithfulness are apparently odious enough to Alithea that a display of either from Sparkish could force her to break the match.

As Act IV opens in Pinchwife's house, the witty Lucy is helping to dress Alithea for her wedding to Sparkish -- a process that she likens to

embalming her for a grave. Here Wycherley's lady in waiting strikes a direct and honest chord as did Prue in *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*. Even though Alithea admits that she has banished Harcourt because she loves him (IV,i,13), her sense of justice will not allow her to deceive the man to whom she is engaged. According to Lucy, and we agree because she is a type of Wycherley character that we are invited to have confidence in, it is Alithea's "word and rigid honour" that prevents her marrying Harcourt because there can be no "greater Cheat, or wrong done to a Man, than to give him your person, without your heart"(IV,i,20). As was common for the dutiful lady in waiting, Lucy advances some persuasive arguments for not marrying Sparkish, but Alithea holds fast to her promise. She intends to be faithful because "'tis *Sparkish's* confidence in my truth, that oblidges me to be so faithful to him" (IV,i,50-51). Though this may seem contrived to a modern audience, particularly after Sparkish's foolish insistence that the parson he has brought is not Harcourt but Harcourt's brother, it is part of Restoration characterization that would play acceptably. As we have noted; for thematic purposes, Alithea has to present a contrast to the other ladies who have a perverted sense of honor.

Before the resolutions of the various actions can occur, Pinchwife must make one last effort to save his forehead. He proposes to prevent Horner's cuckolding him by sending a letter from Margery which he will dictate. Even though the scene has the potential to be tinged with violence, at no time do we really fear that he would use his penknife to write "Whore" on her face or to stab out her eyes, both of which he threatens. True his jealousy does take on a brutality in the text, but it is undercut in

production by his own comic nature and Margery's comical innocence, nicely stated in her final remark that Horner will "ne'er believe, I shou'd write such a letter (IV, i 129-30). Our reaction to Pinchwife remains one of laughter more than fear. When we consider that he married an innocent country girl to avoid all of the problems that his knowledge of the town says exists, he has gotten so much more than he bargained for.

The letter writing scene is delightfully comic for its unpredictability at a time when everything so far has been fairly predictable. Margery, now seemingly more liberated in spirit, expresses initial glee at the prospects of a letter to her lover, "O Lord, to the fine Gentleman a Letter!" She has already managed to persuade the jealously paranoid Pinchwife to take her to the New Exchange and now she is writing letters with his assistance. But her initial reluctance he takes for an expression of her fear that the letter will not contain any love. This is the first hint that she is on the road to becoming a London lady. ..."what do you think I am a fool?" "...Indeed, but I won't [write the letter]"(IV,i, 71 and 73). Much to our pleasure we learn that her objection is simply out of a ingenuous sense of town decorum --"Don't I know that Letters are never writ, but from the Countrey to London, and from London into the Countrey" (IV,i, 81-3).

During the course of her letter, characterized by its honesty, its absence of "Flames, Darts, Fates, Destinies, Lying, and Dissembling" (IV, iii, 349-50), she expresses her love for Horner and her appreciation for her husband's teaching her to write letters. Obviously the more intimate and hot the scene plays, the greater the deception of Pinchwife and the more

engaging and comical the scene. Little does Pinchwife realize as he is locking her up before going to deliver the letter that what he carries is her profession of love. And we laugh more when the results are more and more in opposition to what he intended, and when he sarcastically pretends that it is what it really is. As Pinchwife hands Horner the letter Horner asks "What is't?" Pinchwife replies unknowingly "Only a Love Letter Sir"(IV, iii, 262-64).

By the time Horner is updating Quack on his progress and Wycherley's point of view is clear. As an observer inside the world of the play, Quack, hiding behind a screen, gets ocular proof of Horner's assertion when Lady Fidget enters, asks for assurances that Horner will have a care for her honor, which is really her reputation, and then embraces him with a "dear, dear Mr. Horner." How well his reputation protects her is made evident by Sir Jaspar's reaction when he discovers his wife in such a pose. "He has done nothing yet," she tells her husband, though she also tells him that she promises to have "what I came for yet." And thus the china scene--dramatic and real life proof to Quack that the ruse works with a woman of honor right under the nose of her husband who actually encourages the copulation:

Jas. Wife, my Lady Fidget, he is coming into you
the back way.

Fid. Let him come, and welcome, which way he will.
(IV, iii, 125-7)

By the end of this episode, Quack reaches the conclusion the audience has already reached when he says from behind the screen, as Horner is pulled by the cravat by Lady Squeamish, "I will now believe

anything he tells me"(IV,iii, 225). He has come to see the world as Horner does. The effect of this climax is to solidify our sense of Horner in his role as chief satirist, empowered to act out his ruse, empowered with a knowledge of his world that make him superior to those fools his ruse exposes. The real issue is that while Horner's ruse might seem immoral outside of the world of the play, lying to commit adultery, inside of the world created by Wycherley it is a witty way to expose hypocrisy and the Restoration audience would have seen it for that.

The farcical denouement occurs at Horner's lodging; everyone is on the stage and all of their secrets are revealed. The ladies are drinking and literally and figuratively taking off their masks. Their show and tell proves that to them honor is reputation and nothing more. "Reputation is to cheat those that trust us" (V,iv, 102-03) says Lady Fidget. As their tongues loosen, they surprise each other and Horner by revealing Horner as their lover. Lady Fidget points out that even if they do not get gifts from Horner, they are "all savers of our Honour, the Jewel of most value and use, which shines yet to the world unsuspected, though it be counterfeit" (V,iv, 164-66).

Even though the play is full of examples of characters and relationships dominated by unnatural partners or motivations, Wycherley does include an illustration of a relationship anchored by true trust. When Horner, seeking to protect Margery, indicts Alithea in the scene that threatens to expose his pose, Harcourt shows faith in her innocence as was typical of the reformed rake in Restoration comedy. Alithea expresses concern for her honor when it is called into question and she feels

disgraced, something no one else in the play has enough scruples to feel. Just as unique is Harcourt's display of a brand of trust unlike that of Sparkish or Lady Fidget in that it is not directly linked to reputation. No matter what the world might think of Alithea at this particular point, Harcourt stands ready to trust her virtue and integrity. When Mrs. Pinchwife comes out as the false Alithea, Pinchwife, like the eunuch Diego, draws his sword to express his masculinity and anger. By explaining how Margery is only caught up in her plan to break the match of Sparkish and Alithea, Lucy takes all the blame and thus illustrates the way of this world, that things are as all want to believe that they are.

The play ends with Harcourt and Alithea agreeing to a mature relationship, Dorilant, remaining tied to the old wit ways, saying he is not interested in a relationship; and Pinchwife, we suspect, resigning himself to a marriage to one of natural innocence now educated in the ways of the town:

Lucy. And any wild thing grow but the more fierce
and hungry for being kept up, and more
dangerous to the Keeper.

Ali. There's doctrine far all Husbands, Mr
Harcourt.

Har. I edifie Madam so much, that I am impatient
till I am one.

Dor. And I edifie so much by example I will never
be one.

Spar. And because I will not disparage my parts
I'll ne're be one.

Hor. And alas I can't be one.

Mr. Pin. But I must be one --against my will to a
Country-Wife, with a Country-murraïn to me.
(V, iv, 385-393)

III

The Country Wife: An Assessment

Like *Love in a Wood* and *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*, *The Country Wife* is obviously about marriage as seen through a variety of relationships between the sexes. The satiric point that Wycherley is making through the ridicule directed at the minor characters is that too much is made of appearances at the expense of important values, like honesty and commitment. In that way, Wycherley points to the failure of the contemporary marriage arrangement as he did in *The Gentleman Dancing Master*.²⁵ Marriage is fine when it is thoughtful and real like Harcourt and Alithea's marriage, a relationship clearly intended to be contrasted to that of Pinchwife's and the Jaspars'. When marriage has false motivations, when it is used to secure a bed partner, as in the case of Pinchwife and Margery, and when it lacks real commitment and honesty, as in the case of Sir Jaspar and Lady Fidget, marriage is a farce.

It is evident how Wycherley wants us to judge some of his characters. We laugh at Sparkish, Pinchwife, Sir Jaspar and the ladies who are obviously the objects of ridicule. Lady Fidget, for example, pretends to possess an honor and virtue that she does not. She is ridiculed not for being interested in sex, but for her hypocrisy. Sparkish is judged for his foolishness as a false wit who does not know how to play the love game, or

²⁵See P.F.Vernon, "Marriage of Convenience and the Moral Code of Restoration Comedy, pp. 370-87.

any wit game for that matter, and for approaching the same end as Pinchwife only by the opposite means. Jaspar is being judged for his role in a relationship that he has subordinated to the interests of his business affairs. Commenting on her husband is Lady Fidget, whose couplet says it all: "Who for his business, from his Wife will run; /Takes the best care, to have her bus'ness done." Wycherley finds fault with the sexually insecure Pinchwife, whose inordinate jealousy, motivated by fear of cuckoldom becomes an impediment to a natural relationship,²⁶ and he thinks license to imprison his wife. These are all contrasted with the natural relationship of Harcourt and Alithea that is based on mutual trust and affection.

Even though these affectations are ridiculed, the truth is that Wycherley does not dislike his characters, he only dislikes their weaknesses. Pinchwife, as the foregoing references to staging, acting, timing, juxtaposition have demonstrated, was intended as a comic character. Wycherley wanted the comedy to dominate the vice and so gave us a character to laugh at but not one that we can really hate. Wycherley's point of view, moreover, transcends the comedy of their experiences as we see them dramatized.

The problem of *The Country Wife* is not, however, understanding what we are to make of Pinchwife and Lady Jaspar or Sparkish. Our problem is determining what to conclude about the behavior of Horner, Alithea and Margery. Does Wycherley's satire extend to them? Does the

²⁶Freedman, "Impotence and Self Destruction in *The Country Wife*," p. 427.

play ask us to find Horner's scheme despicable? How does the theatrical milieu help resolve the major questions?

Let's look to Horner as he is the most problematic. Clearly Horner has no control over the world, and the rules it plays by, but the play details the new rules Horner has established for his witty life in world where self interest dominates.²⁷ Horner's new game is to be contrasted to the old game of the wit chase that we saw in *Love in a Wood* and other comedies of the time. In *Love in a Wood*, for instance, Ranger tells his fellow wits that he is going to St. James Park in "hopes of some fresh Game I have in chase." For Horner the hunt as it was popularly played was antiquated because it involved all "the young Fellows of the Town, [who]. .lose more time like Huntsmen, in starting the game, then in running it down." As to suitable objects for the hunt, "one knows not where to find 'em, who will, or will not"(I,i, 148-9). After being introduced to Horner's new rules, his motivation becomes clear: he expects to be rid of old mistresses, and to have the pleasure of making new mistresses. His primary goal is really nothing more than the goal of every wit that ever graced a Restoration comedy, only his target and method are new.

Horner's target is not the world of vizards and the pit; he has shifted his focus to ladies of so-called honor and reputation, and has established a whole new set of rules for playing. His targets are woman of

²⁷Hallet, "The Hobbessian Substructure of *The Country Wife*, p. 380. Hallet argues that "Wycherley is satirizing. . .Hobbes's assertion, and the Hobbists' belief, that the best society is one founded upon enlightened self-interest."

"honor" who are really only woman with a care for their reputation; for 'tis scandal they wou'd avoid, not Men," because it is a good name and not true honor and virtue that motivate their actions. In this world "she that shows an aversion to me loves the sport (I,ii, 152-3). As Horner tells Lady Fidget, "Virtue is your greatest affectation, Madam." The difference is apparent later in the play when Dorilant, a more traditional wit, encounters the ladies of fashion, and asks Horner "what a Divil are these?" (II,i, 46), as if he has never met this brand of pretenders to honor. The difference is also apparent to Sir Jaspar who asks Dorilant to withdraw because "the virtuous ladies have no business with you" (II,i, 445-6). The wits have not hunted the ladies of fashion, and the lack of experience makes Dorilant unfamiliar with this breed. Horner is breaking new ground, and because he is the author of the rules he is predictably destined to be the winner.

Some think that Horner's methods have forced him to pay too great a price for his success. Rose Zimbardo and others have pointed out, that Horner "spreads the rumor. . . so that he may more freely indulge his lust."²⁸ Because Horner is no less false than those he exposes, Zimbardo concludes that he is a hypocrite. The loss of his own honesty makes him no less a hypocrite than any of the fair ladies who pretend to be what they are not. But this conclusion ignores the reality of comedy and Restoration production practices that allowed an audience to become one with a character or an action, and to accept that it was all stage illusion that had no direct reference in reality. The comic reality is that Horner is doing

²⁸Zimbardo, *Wycherley's Satire*, p. 155.

what all wits try to do in most of the comedies of this type throughout the period, a time when as Steele noted in *Tatler* #3, "Love and Wenching were the Business of Life." He is both a character and a comic device. He is a man who pretends to be impotent in the pursuit of women, but who remains a friend and honorable person when not engaged in the chase. As Gerard Weales has said, Horner appeals to the playboy in all men; additionally he appeals to an audience's appreciation of cleverness. Horner's continued dialogue with the audience is his and Wycherley's invitation to see the world of the play with Horner as guide. I do not agree with Chadwick who finds that Horner is neither good nor bad but "quite simply is."²⁹

Wycherley has gone to some lengths to free Horner from his world, to have the audience identify with Horner, and to allow Horner to comment on everyone. I believe, therefore, that we are not inclined to view Horner from a moral angle.³⁰ We enjoy the cleverness of a plot practiced in the spirit of comedy.

Horner is fairly complex character by Wycherley's standards. He is both a man with a mask and without a mask, a man of reality and a man of appearances, who it is difficult to dislike.³¹ Without the mask of impotence and when not engaged in his charade though, he is a man of good

²⁹Chadwick, p. 119.

³⁰Vernon, p. 385.

³¹See Birdsall whose thesis is that Horner is a wholly positive and creative comic hero, and that much of the imagery of the play places him squarely on the side of health, freedom and honesty (p. 136).

sense and compassion. As Craik points out "the strongest argument against interpreting Horner satirically is that Wycherley allows him to comment disparagingly on most of the other characters but provides no disparaging remarks about him."³² We can go one step further to say that his relationships with other characters are exemplary. The very point of the play, however, is that a natural man, the man who understands the importance of honesty, trust, and virtue, appears to the unnatural man as a fraud and vice versa. Remember that Wycherley told us that "Most men are the contraries to what they would seem" (I,i, 250). Horner clearly has a good friendship and good relations with Harcourt and Dorilant. His knowledge and dislike of the play's fools points to his sense of right and wrong outside the actions of his scheme.³³ Those inclined to assume that Horner is the object of ridicule only, do not accept him in his role as comic device, actor, and wit.

Horner is what he says he is, a Machiavellian playing a new kind of witty love game. When the world was precieuse, it encouraged a wit to act in that manner. When the world deals in appearances, he needs to do the same if he is not to fall victim, as Alithea almost does. Horner's is a world of masks, of acting, of players, that does not have idealistic concerns for right and wrong. He is the spokesman for the satirist; "he masks himself but

³²Craik, "Some Aspects of Satire in Wycherley's Plays," p. 178.

³³See Fujimura, *The Restoration Comedy of Wit*, p. 140.

removes the masks from others."³⁴ Some might feel like judging Horner, but neither Wycherley nor the play invite it.

And what are we to make of Alithea and Harcourt? While the marriage of Alithea and Harcourt is clearly better than either the Fidgets' or the Pinchwifes' it would be a mistake to conclude, as Righter does, that Alithea and Harcourt are at the center of the play, and that they are the standard by which the other characters, including Horner, are to be measured.³⁵ While their union is clearly the best of the three, the fact is that Horner and his antics dominate the tone and the action of this play. When the play is over it is the scene in the Exchange with its teasing sensuality, the china scene with its sex, and final scene with its rampant hypocrisy that we remember.

Those that feel compelled to find this third play neater, better constructed, like to point to contrasts, moral lessons, and the like. The fact is that Wycherley's play is better on the stage than the others because of the unifying focus of Horner and the nicely interwoven intrigues and conflicts that revolve around him just as the dance of cuckolds does. Wycherley is here, as he was elsewhere, interested in certain scenes and great at creating them. The plot of Harcourt and Alithea is almost a contrivance--in that it brings a seriousness of purpose to the play that is required if we are not to focus finally on Horner and ask what hope he holds for our world. If

³⁴Berman, *The Ethics of The Country Wife*, p. 55.

³⁵Righter, "William Wycherley," p. 78.

Horner offers the only alternative available to this world, then Wycherley might have satisfied his audience's desire for fun but not its better instincts. If Alithea and Harcourt are a serious option in a world of hypocrisy and affectation that occupies wits and ladies, then Horner's game is simply nothing more than a new set of rules for a new kind of wit.

Anne Richter is correct in saying that Wycherley is not interested in his young lovers, Harcourt and Alithea. What he is interested in is a "vision of society which is being revealed at all times on the outskirts of the play."³⁶ By the end of the play we remember the Alithea-Harcourt relationship as the one serious relationships in a world of false ones, but not as much as we remember the cleverness and vitality of Horner. Even though Harcourt's passage from wit to husband is quick, the audience would have accepted his conventional final words of commitment as thematically necessary.

Horner alludes to one of Wycherley's major thematic concerns in Act I when he expresses his intense dislike of all those "that force Nature, and woul'd be still what she forbids' em; Affectation is her greatest Monster"(I,i,248-9). Those that force nature are governed by pretense and appearances. In a world like this, the greatest honor belongs to the greatest disguise. In an unnatural world like this, honor and virtue are unconnected, love and trust and esteem have given way to mercenary and lustful self interests. Wycherley's interest in this kind of general satire and theatrical

³⁶*Ibid.*

effectiveness is much greater than his interest or qualifications to present a consistent moral view of society like we find in Moliere or Jonson.

One thing that is clear is that the world of the play is attacked. Implicit in Horner's scheme and Margery's experience is the reality that natural emotional and physical impulses in unnatural marriages like hers will be realized only through subterfuge.³⁷ A commitment to honor, however, can eventually have its reward as it does for Alithea. In the process of exposing the pretenders to virtue, modesty and honor, to marriage and to wit, Wycherley is suggesting that when the world has no regard for things as they should be, things as they are become good enough. The country wife has been educated by a short visit to London. But there is no significant change in Margery by the end of the play. The others on the stage have to stop her from blurting out her love for Horner to protect their own "honor." Margery's experience, then, is one that has her at the play's end where Horner was at the beginning--with knowledge of her world and some incentive for developing a plan to live in it. She has had the kind of experience that makes us wonder, as we do with Ranger and Lydia, what will become of her on her next trip to town.

The world of *The Country Wife* is a world of self deception, where what seems to be passes for what is, where "Cozens, Justices, Clerks, and Chaplains," are all cuckold makers, and where as Harcourt says, "Most Men are the contraries to that they woul'd seem" (I,i,218-19). Ronald Berman correctly states that "In so far as this is a world largely corrupt, Horner is a

³⁷See Hallet, "Hobbesian Substructure in *The Country Wife*," p.

satirist"³⁸ in the sense that as a character his function is to expose vice, folly, hypocrisy, jealousy and dishonor.

There is little need to say much about the evidence we have in *The Country Wife* for Wycherley's maturity as a dramatist. His success in intermingling the three plots (Alithea, Harcourt and Sparkish, the Pinchwife's and Horner, and Horner, Sir Jaspar and the ladies), in the exposition of themes, the pacing of the expository first two acts, in the creation of the witty dialogue, the nice balancing of relationships and character types, the double entendre, the use of dialogue to identify characters and create humor (Jaspars' formality, Margery's innocence, Fidget's falseness, etc.), the irony and sexuality of the breeches part, all point to new artistic control. Clearly Wycherley has made great strides as a playwright. Gone are the scene's for a joke's sake, the crowded and confused plots of *Love in a Wood*. *The Country Wife* has all that was needed and nothing that was not.

Like other Wycherley "heroes", Horner has concluded that the world is unnatural, full of affectation and hypocrisy, and he simply has an unnatural and witty scheme for taking advantage of it. In the process he will let at least half the world think that it is taking advantage of him. In simplest terms what we have here is a new and witty way to secure a whore. Fujimura is mistaken when he says that Horner "intended not only to satisfy his appetite, but to expose the 'preciseness' of women like Lady Fidget." Exposing the preciseness of women like Lady Fidget is Wycherley's concern.

³⁸Berman, "The Ethics of *The Country Wife*," p. 48.

CHAPTER V

"THE PLAIN DEALER: TOO MUCH SELF-RELIANCE"

Like *The Country Wife*, *The Plain Dealer* has generated diverse critical commentary. Most of the discussion centers around Manly, the main character, and falls into one of three general camps: for some Manly is the hero and satiric spokesman,¹ for others he is the butt of the satire,² for others he is a confused hybrid creation--half satirist and half romantic lover, or half spokesman and half satirized humours character³. One critic

¹See Bobamy Dobree, *Restoration Comedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), pp. 88 and 89; Rose A. Zimbardo, *Wycherley's Drama: A Link in the Development of English Satire* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1965), pp. 73-5, 124; and Virginia Ogden Birdsall, *Wild Civility: The English Comic Spirit on the Restoration Stage* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), pp. 157, 173-7.

²See Thomas H. Fujimura, *The Restoration Comedy of Wit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), pp. 118, 148; Norman N. Holland, *The First Modern Comedies: The Significance of Etherege, Wycherley and Congreve* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), pp. 98, 99; and Alexander H. Chorney, "Wycherley's Manly Reinterpreted," *Essays Critical and Historical in Honor of Lily B. Campbell* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950), pp. 161-69.

³Derek Cohen, "The Alternating Styles of the *The Plain Dealer*," *RECTR*, 2 (1987) pp.19-37. See also K.M. Rogers, "Fatal Inconsistency: Wycherley and *The Plain Dealer*," *ELH*, 28 (1961), pp. 148-62.

has even argued that Manly is specifically the portrait of a contemporary, John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave.⁴ About the play's tone there seems majority consensus--it is satiric, savage, sardonic, and bitter, though recently critics have been noticing the comic elements all but lost in earlier readings. In spite of the diversity of opinion concerning specific characters, there is general agreement that the play is a "very strange play"⁵ though the strangeness is variously attributed to Manly's complexity or Wycherley's failures in composition.⁶ Even Wycherley's contemporaries were puzzled by the play, withholding their approbation until the applause of Rochester and a few wits helped earn it lasting reputation.⁷

A good deal of the recent criticism correctly focuses on Manly as the obvious key to the play's meaning. In an attempt to understand Manly, however, we must be careful not to narrow dangerously our critical focus. Because Manly can only be understood with reference to the world of the play, we must look at his interactions with other characters, the timing of

⁴See J.M. Auffert, "The Man of Mode and The Plain Dealer: Common Origins and Parallels," *Etudes Anglaises*, 19 (1966), pp. 209-222. In addition to Mulgrave being Manly, Olivia is a composite of two of Mulgrave's mistresses, and Freeman is a composite of Henry Saville and Henry Bulkeley.

⁵Robert D. Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 303.

⁶W.R.Chadwick, *The Four Plays of William Wycherley* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), p. 174.

⁷*Critical Works of John Dennis*, ed. E. N. Hooker, v. ii, p. 237.

his entrances and exits, the juxtaposition of scenes, and the overriding tone of all the action, characters and situations. We must also be careful to separate Manly and Wycherley, lead character and author. Even though Wycherley liked the appellation "plain-dealer" bestowed on him by his contemporaries, and even though the play invites biographical connections, we have seen throughout the comedies Wycherley's tendency to allow a good number of his characters to speak for him. Placing the play in its historical, theatrical context will put more sharply defined boundaries on our options and illustrate two main points: that the dynamics of production demonstrate Manly's transformation from satiric spokesman to satiric butt to reformed hero, and that the play's tone is more comic than sardonic.

I

Audience and Practice

When *The Plain Dealer* premiered at the Drury Lane Theatre in December of 1676, it was at a time fruitful for Restoration drama. From the vain "shows and scenes," "machines and Tempests,"⁸ that earlier Dryden decried, Restoration comedy was passing to its full glory with Dryden, Shadwell, Wycherley, Behn and Crowne at their peaks, a new theater in operation, and twice as many new productions in 1676 as in 1673.⁹

⁸Dryden, "Prologue on the Opening of the New House," *The Works of John Dryden*, v. 1, ed. Vinton Dearing, pp. 149-50.

⁹Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century*, p. 300.

According to Hume, the two theater companies produced 18 new plays in both the 1676-77 and 1677-78 seasons. By contrast, only six new plays were staged in the 78-79 season.¹⁰

Possibly encouraging the renewed creativity of the playwrights was what must have seemed an impending crisis. The King's Company, for example, was once again suffering, producing only two new plays and losing Dryden and Lee to the Duke's Company. The audiences continued to shrink as a growing anti-sex sentiment was quietly taking its toll.¹¹ By 1679, when politics were also beginning to infect the theater, audience interest was all but dead. In this environment, exploring new dramatic options hardly seemed risky.

Wycherley, then, found himself in front of a heterogeneous crowd that was getting smaller, and in the midst of a Restoration theater waiting for something to excite it. After three plays Wycherley was less interested in conforming his genius to the age's dramatic notions, and the audience probably felt the same way. While conventional and based heavily on

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 318-19.

¹¹John Harrington Smith, "Shadwell, the Ladies, and the Change in Comedy," *MP*, 46 (1948), pp. 22-33.

borrowings,¹² *The Plain Dealer* remains thoroughly original and thoroughly English in spite of its indebtedness to Moliere and Jonson.¹³

II

Performance and the Play

As the play opens Charles Hart, who earlier played Ranger and Horner, was seen pacing the proscenium. Immediately the audience knew that it was watching the lead character because Hart always played a lead, having earned his reputation by playing rake heroes opposite Nell Gwynn. The audience also knew that Lord Plausible, played by Jo Haines who acted the part of Sparkish in *The Country Wife*, and who was following Hart about the stage, was a fool. What distinctions the audience could not readily make between the two parts based on the actors themselves,¹⁴ it made based on the differences in costume and manner, one being a rough and angry sea captain, and one a "Ceremonious Supple, Commending Coxcomb."

¹²John Wilcox, *The Relation of Moliere to Restoration Comedy* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1938), pp. 82-104. See also Peter Dorman, "Wycherley's Adaptation of *Le Misanthrope*," *RECTR*, 8 (1969), pp. 51-9.

¹³See A. M. Friedson, "Wycherley and Moliere: Satirical Point of View in *The Plain Dealer*," *MP*, 64 (1967). Friedson argues the *The Plain Dealer* is unique for Wycherley's shifting Moliere's satiric focus from the protagonist to society in general (p. 196).

¹⁴See Peter Holland, *The Ornament of Action: Text and Performance in Restoration Comedy* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 170-203. Holland presents an overly complicated discussion of the intentional inversion of the audiences' expectations when it came to the actor and actresses that acted in *The Plain Dealer*.

The ensuing dialogue reinforced this difference by placing both men at two extremes when it comes to their assessments of the world. Manly seems "to like no Body[,] follow Love and esteem no Body." (I,i,12-13). Plausible, on the other hand, seems to "follow every Body, Court and kiss every Body; though perhaps at the same time, [hating] every Body"(I,i,14-16). Both positions strike us as too severe, but our sympathies are initially and justifiably with Manly for even though his point of view is extreme, his comments are directed at someone who is superficial and pretentious by definition. When Plausible mentions that if he does an "ill thing to any Body, it shou'd be sure to be behind their backs, out of pure good manners"(I,i,41-42) we are reminded of Wycherley's attitude to similar remarks made in earlier plays by Dapperwit as a fool and Hippolita as a critic. The audience's initial sense of the two actors was then confirmed by subsequent dialogue. If Manly is raging against foolish behavior, something we see exhibited by Dapperwit in *Love in a Wood*, Paris in *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*, and Sparkish in *The Country Wife*, then he is in the right.

The fact that this exchange between Manly and Plausible does nothing to advance the plot suggests its importance in establishing the audience's initial reaction to Manly. Early on, Wycherley forces the audience to apply its own standards against two extreme points of view to gain support for Manly. Wycherley knew that the audience would have accepted as true the statement that "Speaking well of all Mankind, . . . takes away the Reputation of the few good Men in the World, by making all alike" (I,i, 31-2). As one critic has said, in a "world where social intercourse demands certain kinds of dishonesty, [Manly's] capacity to speak his mind

immediately and straightforwardly without regard for the consequences is like fresh air in an infected place."¹⁵ But the audience, then and now, also knew that in spite of accepting the truth of Manly's position, it would not be willing to go so far as Manly in applying such an absolute standard. The audience's initial sense of Manly is positive, but not wholly positive. He has two sides, one surly and misanthropic, fueled by excessive pride; and one honest, albeit, indecorously honest in contrast to the fool Plausible. His pride has him lashing out at a world that is not measuring up to his standard, which is at this point at variance with the audience's standard. While we might agree that the world is comprised of hypocrites and dissemblers, no one can reasonably apply an absolute standard to measure its deficiencies. Horner railed at his world, but also devised a scheme that allowed him greater control. He existed along side of true friends while taking advantage of the false. While the world of the *The Plain Dealer* is corrupt, and Manly is in the right, he seems less right for his intolerance of all that he meets. And his is hardly a balanced rational position for "if I ever speak well of people," he says, "it shou'd be sure to be behind their backs" (I,i,43-4).¹⁶

It becomes apparent as Manly rudely invites Plausible to leave that Manly's vituperation is directed at all visitors and all men, and not

¹⁵Cohen, "The Alternating Styles of the *The Plain Dealer*," p.19.

¹⁶Cohen points out that Manly's opening speeches are based a a "I/thou" dialectic where the "I" world is good and the "thou" world is bad. "The Alternating Styles of the *The Plain Dealer*," p. 26.

simply at the silly, formal coxcomb with whom he is speaking. As he moves Lord Plausible across the stage and out one of the proscenium side doors, we are left to wonder what manner of man is this? We know that he is not a wit like Horner, nor is he like Freeman, both of whom recognize the folly of their worlds and both of whom manipulate the fools around them.

Subsequent scenes help us more completely evaluate the validity of Manly's position on "ceremony." To aid our evaluation we have the exchange between the two lively sailors, who have been "behind" on the scenic stage area witnessing the foregoing. Like Quack in *The Country Wife*, we trust their objectivity because the only dramatic purpose they serve is to comment on the action that has just transpired and to complete the exposition. To them, Manly is a "finical" man "weary of this side of the World," "rough and angry," "a hurry-durry Blade," who hated life enough to physically assault the sailor who saved his life. Because of his dislike of the world, Manly was to settle in the Indies, being prevented by the sinking of his ship. Rather than the picture of "a man of considerably integrity",¹⁷ this is a portrait of a man with too good an opinion of himself, and a quarrel with the world that is his own. His pride in his ability to assess his world and his despair at failing to escape it have combined to shape a monster.

It is interesting to contrast the audience's early reactions to both Horner and Manly. Horner is accepted by the audience without judgment because he is witty, attractive and importantly distanced by his scheme

¹⁷Chadwick, *The Plays of William Wycherley*, p. 140.

from the world that the audience accepts as false and corrupt. Manly's estimate of his world is equally accurate, in fact more accurate when he later discovers the falseness of Olivia and Vernish, the only two people that he thought sincere. But unlike Horner, Manly does not make the best of life in a bad world. He arrogantly sets himself above it, by holding his fellow men to a standard of behavior inconsistent with human weakness. Horner lets the fools of his world expose themselves, though he does provide some assistance. Manly, on the other hand, starts off passing judgment. Horner is an acceptable hero above reproach because the audience likes to think itself like Horner. The audience does not find Manly's position attractive because by extension it too is in the wrong. It therefore distances itself from Manly.

To validate the audience's sense that Manly's position is too severe, Wycherley introduces Freeman, a "Gentleman well Educated, but of a broken Fortune, a Complyer with the Age." Freeman, acted by Edward Kynaston, who played another of Wycherley's moderate characters, Harcourt in *The Country Wife*, espouses balanced, rational views on the role of ceremony, and in process invites comparison with Manly. Echoing the sentiments of the chorus of sailors, Freeman, the typical amoral wit, who is not above playing up to the fools if it will get him what he wants, points to the rather indecorous treatment of Plausible, who Manly has just used with "very little Ceremony, it seems." Manly utters the truth that a man should not be esteemed for his title only, and further that "intrinsick worth" and not "counterfeit Honour" are the measure of a man. While valid, this remark does nothing to alter Freeman's tacit opinion that rudeness is

socially impractical. It also invites the audience to begin its own assessment of just how well Manly judges "intrinsic worth."

Freeman initiates a line of discourse similar to Plausible's to demonstrate his own point. Surely, Freeman says, if you will not admit coxcombs you will at least see your Friends. Manly responds that he has "but one [friend] . . . and can have but one Friend, for a true heart admits but of one friendship, as of one love . . . Such a [real friend] I think him; for I have trusted him with my Mistress in my absence: and the trust of Beauty, is sure the greatest we can shew"(I,i, 203-05). Anyone familiar with Restoration theater would know that this man must be a great friend, or that Manly is foolish for in Restoration comedy to leave your woman with another man is to be a cuckold. Freeman even mentions later that Manly "would never trust [him] to see Olivia" (I,i,504). In the normal scheme of things, the Restoration theater audience was probably suspicious of Manly because of his extreme point of view, now unfavorably contrasted with the moderate opinions of Freeman, and now even more so because he is acting like many of the humours fools that invite cuckolding.

Ironically, the one who will prove to love Manly without condition, Fidelity, is drawn directly into the discussion by Manly who, mocking Freeman, asks her if she loves him as much as any man can. To Fidelity, Manly is "the bravest, [and] Worthiest of Mankind"(I,i,336). When she says in her romantic way that she could die for him, he brings this remark into the world of his reality by saying he disbelieves her because she has shown herself afraid in battles at sea. Here the audience is involved in the irony of Fidelity being a woman in man's dress whose very bravery is

not in question because she has already successfully acted the part of a man. She confidently says, "Can he be said to be afraid, that ventures to Sea with you" (I,i,341).

Some critics, like Birdsall, feel that Manly is never the butt of Wycherley's satire, even though he is "unreasonably intolerant" and therefore "quite intolerable."¹⁸ But at this point it seems that communication with anyone is impossible for Manly because he assumes a difference between what one says and what one is, and a confidence in his ability to ascertain that difference. Freeman can see the truth of Fidelity's words supported by the evidence of her tears and her voice. "Poor Youth! believe his eyes, if not his tongue; he seems to speak truth with them" (I,i,348-9). But it means nothing to Manly who can only see the world from his distorted and self-focused point of view. Even the importuning that she is "helpless and friendless" does nothing to assuage his misanthropy. For his lack of discrimination in the face of sincerity and kindness, Manly's honesty continues to look more and more like foolish pride and excessive self-reliance.

In order for Manly's "honesty" to be continually held in an unfavorable light by the audience, and for him to be viewed as the butt of Wycherley's satire, it would have been necessary for the Restoration audience to take the character of Fidelity seriously. Working against such an acceptance is the fact that our first introduction to Fidelity, who is an odd combination of a breeches part and a Shakespearean romantic heroine, has

¹⁸Birdsall, *Wild Civility*, p. 161.

her offering sincerely expressed superlatives about Manly, a man we have just determined is undeserving of such praise. Afterall we have just heard Manly espouse a moral standard that is absolute, and further we have heard him pridefully conclude that only he of all men meets it. At this point Manly is prideful and not foolish; he is like the characters of tragedy weakened by a dominating flaw. In any case Manly is not admirable for the existence of a weakness that his pride does not allow him to see.

Immediately the question is how can Fidelia love Manly--who loves almost nothing and nobody. For the Restoration audience the answer was simple-- convention.¹⁹ Fidelia is to be accepted as the innocent who adores the man destined to be transformed by the action of the play. While she has some wonderful comic moments, Fidelia is a vestigial²⁰ character, one that functions like Christina in *Love in a Wood* as a symbol rather than a character, as a virtue to be contrasted with a vice. And Wycherley could count on the Restoration audience to know how to react. After all, Fidelia was played by Mrs. Boutel who acted Christina in *Love in a Wood*, and Margery, a breeches part, in *The Country Wife*. Mrs. Boutel was often cast opposite Mrs. Marshall, who here acted the part of the hypocritical, lustful

¹⁹See J.L. Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p 84. Styan notes that a major problem in understanding the characters in Restoration comedy is due to a modern critical perspective. The conventional characters that populate Restoration comedies, Styan concludes, cannot "support the analysis applied to the modern problem play."

²⁰Anne Righter, "The Satiric Design in *The Plain Dealer*," *Studies in English Literature*, 1 (1961), p. 136.

and mercenary Olivia, as the virtue to be contrasted to her vice. The audience would have believed her as Freeman does because she is the character meant to be believed.

To moderate the effects of the prideful anger of Manly, already partially mitigated by the balanced views of Freeman and Fidelity, Wycherley shifts the action, and with it the tone of the play, to two of his humourous characters, Widow Blackacre and her son, Jerry, who by definition are both handicapped by their legal excesses. From one of the side doors, out came the Widow Blackacre, played by Mrs. Cory, Lucy of *The Country Wife* and Mrs. Joyner of *Love in a Wood*. The widow, "a Litigious She Petty-fogger" enters the stage as a farcical symbol of one slowed by, and laden with the law, here illustrated by the green bags and clutched legal papers that she and Jerry carry. Wycherley used actress, costume, and props to lend satiric power to the characterization of these two farcical parts.

By this stage of the action, we know that Manly's point of view is untenable, but we must decide on the appropriate reaction: laughter or derision. There are those that believe Wycherley wants us to understand Manly's folly and not just acknowledge it,²¹ but these do not take into account Manly's actions in the context of the production. To assist us, Wycherley has Manly's self-interested and myopic point of view comically challenged and frustrated by the Widow, who like Manly, sees the world and her relationships through a narrow viewer. Violating his own order, Manly admits the Widow Blackacre who has come to prepare Manly for a trial at

²¹Birdsall, *Wild Civility*, p. 161.

which he will appear as a witness. Manly hopes for news of his love, Olivia, who is a cousin to Blackacre. Manly and the Widow are both so comically self-focused that neither even offers a greeting to the other on first sight; they simply exchange insults until the Widow gets Jerry to recite her suit, a case at which Manly is the chief witness. Jerry's inability to effectively communicate the particulars of the case heap further comedy on an already comic scene. Manly's surliness here, typified by his grabbing and throwing away the subpoena as he exits, seems foolishly extreme in a world of fools like the Blackacres. This is the first indication that he is a character whose extreme notions about his own perspicacity are cause for laughter.²² From this point on it is impossible to take much of his ranting seriously. It is not that he is not right in wanting to be free of the fools, it is the futility of his interactions with others that make him and his positions all the more ludicrous.

To this point, the audience accepts Freeman as the opportunistic wit character with a view of his world that demonstrates tolerance for the faults of others, and Fidelia as the conventional, adoring romantic lover. Because it is difficult for Manly's extreme point of view to continue to enlist our sympathy, we anxiously await the opportunity to meet a person

²²A. M. Friedson also accepts that Manly has a comic side: "the concept of Manly as a 'humours' character is valuable in bringing out the element of comic bluntness in his character. The interpretation is especially convincing in the light of Manly's being a naval captain in a comic nautical tradition, which was often found in the comedy of humors." See "Wycherley and Moliere: Satirical Point of View in *The Plain Dealer*," *MP*, 64 (1967), p. 196.

that meets his standards for friendship and love. Olivia has already been faultlessly described by Manly:

She is so perfect a Beauty, that Art cou'd not better it, nor affectation deform it; yet all this is nothing. Her tongue as well as face, ne'r knew artifice; nor ever did her words or looks contradict her heart: She is all truth, and hates the lying, masking, daubing World, as I do: for which I love her....for she has often shut out of her conversation for mine, the gaudy fluttering Parrots of the Town, Apes, and Echoes of men only, and refus'd their common place pert chat, flattery, and submissions, to be entertained with my sullen bluntness, and honest love. And last of all, swore to me, since her Parents wou'd not suffer her to go with me, she wou'd stay behind for no other man; but follow me, without their leave, if not to be obtain'd. (I,i,554-566).

Even though Manly fashions himself a good judge of "intrinsick worth," the audience knows that no woman could be so perfect because the audience knows that Manly has been set up by Wycherley. We can therefore assume that Manly, who can neither see nor hear the sincerity of those on stage, has projected himself onto his mate. The result of this delusion foreshadows a comic betrayal at the hands of a woman whose own lack of fortune and willingness to guard Manly's provide suitable motivation.

Just as he did in other plays, Wycherley has established a pattern of contrasting character types and alternating tones: from the extreme positions of Manly, to the moderate ones of Freeman, to the romantic view of Fidelia; from the rage of Manly to the light comedy of Plausible, to the visually satiric humours comedy of Blackacre. By the end of Act I it is apparent that Wycherley had no intention of letting Manly's opening scene surliness dominate the play. We know that Freeman is a wit and

opportunist, but a man with a plan to meet his own needs; that Manly is narcissistic,²³ so sure of his own sense of right and wrong that he only values those that mirror back the image of himself; that Fidelia, with whom we expect to see Manly by the conclusion, and her idealistic commitment and expressions of love are conventional and therefore sincere; and that Olivia is apparently the picture of perfection though we suspect Manly's objectivity.

Wycherley does an excellent job of continuing to lighten the tone of the satire while maintaining his satiric focus on a world of affectation, vanity and hypocrisy. Now we move to Olivia's lodging, and the social comedy of Act II. It is important to remember as the scene opens that Olivia has so far been described by Manly as a person free of the affectations and pretenses of the world. On the stage, the Restoration audience would have seen Olivia, Rebecca Marshall, who we have said was frequently set opposite Mrs. Boutel,²⁴ and Olivia's cousin, Eliza, played by Mary Knepp, known for the comic part of Ladies Fidget and Flippant. Olivia, like Manly before her, assumes the role of a censurer of the world while she primps and prepares her person, probably at her dressing table, for the arrival of the two fools who will later enter the stage. Wycherley

²³See Anthony Kaufman, "Idealization, Disillusion, and Narcissistic Rage in Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer*," *Criticism*, 21 (1979), p. 120. Kaufman views Manly's rage as an expression of a psychological imbalance rather than a moral position.

²⁴Holland, *Ornament of Action*, p. 185. "Mrs. Marshall and Mrs. Boutell together provided a pattern. Lust against virtue was compounded by virtue's disguise and lust's attractiveness."

confuses his audience expectation of Olivia's presumed duplicity by having her say what we would all expect out of the mouth Manly: "What a World 'tis we live in! I am weary of it" (II,i,1-2). Immediately the others on stage offered a commentary. Eliza, who is a favorable portrait of a witty, plain-dealing woman, on the one hand, can find no fault with the world, "but that we cannot always live in't it"(II,i,3-4). Lettice, mimicking the complaints of ladies of virtue, comically undercuts Olivia's assessment by suggesting that the world, like a "Keeping Gallant," is accused of being censorious, malicious, false, or perfidious depending upon the particular sins of the evaluator:

Lettice: A Gallant indeed, Madam, whom Ladies first make jealous, and then quarrel with it for being so, for if, by her indiscretion, a Lady be talk'd of for a Man, she cryes presently, *'Tis a Censorious World*; if, by her vanity, the Intrigue be found out, *'Tis a prying malicious World*; if, by her overfondness, the Gallant proves inconstant, *'Tis a false World*; and if, by her nigardliness, the Chambermaid tells, *'Tis a perfidious World*: but that, I'm sure, your Ladyship cannot say of the World yet, as bad as 'tis." (II,i,15-22)

All of this would be more comic following an exchange of knowing glances between Eliza and Lettice, made in full view of the audience. Wycherley loved to have his ladies-in-waiting comment knowingly on their charges, and we will see that Eliza likes to expose the histrionics of Olivia whom she knows to be a fraud. In any case, Olivia, who resents the suggestion implied in Lettice's final words, looks at her and says, "But I may say, *'Tis a*

very impertinent World. Hold your peace"(II,i,23). Olivia knows that Lettice is speaking about her, and she steps outside the role she has assumed for Eliza's benefit long enough to let Lettice know that enough is enough.

Wycherley does a couple of important things in this opening exchange: he sets the tolerant, plain-dealing views of Eliza against the phoniness of Olivia that is established almost immediately; he has Lettice articulate the standard that she, Wycherley and now the audience know to be the standard that Olivia uses to make her public pronouncements about the world; and he establishes Olivia as an actress who wears whatever mask she needs to. This last point will be important in understanding the character of Olivia who seems at times both a fool and a wit. As a chameleon she is much more the proper comic antagonist for a man like Manly who prides himself on his ability to judge sincerity and true friendship. As an actress she also becomes an interesting challenge to the audience in its attempt to discover what she is about.

The laughing social satire continues in a set piece reminiscent of the earlier plays that has the knowing Eliza asking Olivia in a baiting way if it is possible that the world holds nothing at all that she might like. In a scene that probably had its origin near Olivia's dressing table where Olivia could be seen looking at herself, Eliza asks, "What d'ye think of Dressing, and fine Cloathes?" With that challenge Rebecca Marshall had to make plain by her actions the opposite of what she says.²⁵ Olivia's prompt reply that "tis her aversion" is promptly contradicted by her immediate concern

²⁵Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance*, p. 128.

for tidying up Eliza's hairpiece which she "cannot suffer." Olivia is shown to be a repository of clichés, and a confusion of mismatched words and actions. Her lack of concern for her contradictory behavior demonstrates that she makes no connection between what she feels obligated to say and what she is actually doing. Everything that Eliza or Lettice mention, from dressing, to gowns, to gallants, to visits, to balls, to masquerades, and to Hyde Park, inexorably build to where Olivia must now conclude that to her even the court is the aversion of all aversion, because sincerity is a quality quite out-of-fashion there. It is comically ironic that Olivia, who so far has not expressed a single view that matches her actions, would find sincerity to be such an important ingredient in a right world. Such a characterization of Olivia encourages the audience to see Manly as a fool who sets such high standards for his fellowman, but is then deceived by such a one as this.

Furthermore Eliza offers a position that reinforces this reaction to Manly. She discriminates between what is in fashion, like railing, and the sacrifice or disregard of real principles, a distinction that Manly is unable to make. Eliza concludes knowingly that Olivia's aversion is really to plain-dealing. "[P]erhaps that's your quarrel to the World; for that it will talk, as your Woman says" (II,I,99-100), implying that it is only the knowledge of dissembling, not the dissembling that bothers Olivia. As Fujimura has noted, Eliza is a "true wit" and principally a mouthpiece for Wycherley, though she is not as he suggests, the most important figure in the play.²⁶

²⁶Fujimura, *Restoration Comedy of Wit*, p. 150. Fujimura concludes wrongly, I think, that Eliza is Wycherley's *beau idéal*, and Manly is an "object of ridicule because he is deficient in wit" (p. 148). Eliza does express views that Wycherley would agree with, and Manly is deficient in wit, but Fujimura's conclusion does not take into account the transformation that

Wycherley continues to emphasize the comedy of a world of empty ceremony and empty conversation as a way of "proving the spoken satire of Act I."²⁷ Unlike the satire of Act I, however, the tone remains comic. In order to let Eliza know that she conducts herself in a way above censure, Olivia says, "Talk not to me sure; for what Men do I converse with? what Visits do I admit?"(II,i,101-02). Before she can complete her sentence Wycherley's sense of comic timing takes over and a boy enters to announce the arrival of a gentleman. Mrs. Marshall would no doubt have feigned surprise at the announcement of her visitor, none other than Mr. Novel, a "pert, railing Coxcomb, and an Admirer of Novelties" who is, it seems, at least a frequent visitor. In spite of the fact that a guest is here to see her, Olivia insists that she is not expecting any visitors, and that Novel is a name that she does not know. Unquestionably, she is the worst kind of hypocrite, and one who is nicely contrasted with Eliza, who represents, like Freeman, a more balanced approach to a world that is neither perfect nor without some redeeming value. When Novel is finally admitted, and we hear of his dinner at Mrs. Autumn's, we see a protracted example of exactly the thing that Manly claimed to despise--flattery and hypocrisy, from those who do not have the courage to be critical of others to their face but who wait until after they had dined with them to call attention to their deformities and short comings.

Manly undergoes, nor does it take into account Wycherley's practice of allowing all his characters to express opinions with which he would agree.

²⁷Zimbardo, *Wycherley's Drama*, p. 132.

The discussion at the expense of Mrs. Autumn and her guests exposes a new side of Olivia. The earlier scene at her dressing table created the impression of one lacking the self-knowledge required to see the disparity between what she does and what she claims to believe. Now we are treated to an Olivia that is expert at crafting witty similes. One critic has described Olivia as alternately a fool and a wit, attributing the evident shift in style of speech to Wycherley's applying "new layers of personality to his characters without apparent regard for what already exists."²⁸ This scene is either an example of the character "inconsistency" that we saw in the earlier plays, where Wycherley's interest in comedy seems to violate the logic of the action or a character's role in that action; or it is just another of the parts that the duplicitous Olivia acted in her attempts to manipulate her world. The former is easy to accept because we have seen that Wycherley did not always hold character consistency to be important, particularly if the episode where the inconsistency is displayed is not likely to lessen the planned impact of character or situation. The fact is that no matter how much we laugh with her here, it will do nothing to negate our impression of her as a mercenary hypocrite. Moreover, we have seen that the only consistency of character required by Restoration comedy was established by a dominating humour or character type, and her dominating type has been set.

Additionally though, Olivia so far has been seen to be an actor and a director, impersonating and staging as her situation requires. For

²⁸Cohen, "The Alternating Styles of the *The Plain Dealer*," p.23.

starters she has fooled Manly into thinking that she is like him a hater of the World. Our first introduction to her is while she is in that pose. Remember her opening lines, a clear echo of Manly. The major difference is that Manly is so deceived as to believe what she says, while she only wants others to believe that she believes what she says. We have seen her drop her mask only once and that was when she ordered Lettice to hold her tongue. Now that she is around the would-be wits, Novel and Plausible, she assumes a new role, frequently commented on by Eliza who acts as the audience's guide during this long scene that ends in the well-known discussion of *The Country Wife*, where she exposes her own hypocrisy while laboring under the delusion that Eliza is revealing her concupiscence.²⁹ When she needs to project a superior sense of virtue to Eliza she affects a disgust with "the filthy World." When she needs to demonstrate a superior sense of wit with the false wits she can do that too. Wycherley has developed the falseness of her character at great length to demonstrate beyond question the foolishness of Manly, who has judged a woman completely given over to the deception of Manly, of Eliza, of Vernish, as having intrinsic worth.

The length of this scene and its emphasis on wit, raillery, and hypocrisy, particularly in the discussion of *The Country Wife*, and the extreme behavior of the participants, is further evidence that the dominant tone is not sardonic, but more comic, and that Manly is just one fool in a world that he has at least rightly described as false.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 23.

Wycherley has set the audience up for the Olivia-Manly meeting just as he set it up for the meeting of Diego and Paris in *The Gentleman Dancing Master*, by introducing both to the audience separately so that it could anticipate the conflict. And so into this scene of hypocrisy and affectation enter Manly, with Freeman and Fidelia in the background. Even though Manly sees Olivia in "close conversation" with these "supple Rascals, the Out-Casts of Sempstresses shops" (II,1, 473-74) he is so blinded by his assessment of her character that he refuses to believe what he sees and what the audience already knows. He addresses the audience in an aside, in an attempt to convince the ally that he had early in Act I that "She yet seems concern'd for my safety"(II,i,489), but the audience knows better. And soon he does too. After denigrating him in conversation with Novel and Plausible, Olivia attacks Manly's complexion, his dress, and finally his humour by suggesting that "Opinion is [his] only Mistress, for you renounce that to, when it becomes another Mans"(II,i,614-16). All of this is accompanied by the laughing chorus of Novel and Plausible. Olivia makes clear that her double dealing has cost Manly both his wealth and his mistress. The result is that Manly promises to "despise, condemn, hate, loath, and detest"(II,i, 656) her. At this point the scorned Manly is penniless, insulted, and cursed by a dissembling fraud. All he can do is promise revenge. The early conflict of Manly versus his world is now replaced by a new one, Manly versus Olivia; and the earlier characterization of Manly as fool gives way to Manly as vengeful and bitter scorned lover. Wycherley nicely complicates the revenge angle by making clear Olivia's

growing lustful interest in Fidelia whom she describes to the audience at this time as an "agreeable young Fellow" (II,i,684).

By the time Act Two ends with a movement from the promise of Manly's revenge to comic farce and Freeman's attempts to secure the wealth of the Widow Blackacre, our perception of Manly has changed significantly. From the angry critic of the world who saw only the evil, we now know him to be a self-deceived ranter. Of the two people he trusts, one, Olivia, has turned out to be a hypocrite. While this might generate sympathy because one of the last human beings he had faith in has soured, it primarily serves to demonstrate the untenable nature of his earlier position. His ranting and ravings are now seen in a different light--and the potential threat to his well-being comes from him and not his world. It is not possible to take him seriously when his actions are illuminated by the character of those around him.

Some argue that while Manly is certainly discredited to some extent by the exposure of Olivia, that he remains correct in his general vision of the world. At the beginning of the play he believes all people are fools and liars except Olivia and Vernish. It turns out finally that almost all of the people in the play are liars or fools, with the exception of Freeman and Fidelia. While it is true that Manly is right in his generalization, that does not absolve him of responsibility for his prideful intolerance that mistakenly puts him above the whole of his race.

Following his cruel treatment by Olivia, Manly decides to hide his love for Olivia from Freeman and the world, and thus signals his decline into the very hypocrisy he loathes. Manly's motivation is to preserve his

own reputation in the world which is now more important than his sense of honesty and righteousness. Unintentionally, however, Manly reveals his love sickness to Fidelia. And this scene demonstrates his inability to see the true honor that the adoring Fidelia represents and which he continually mistakes for dissembling:

Man. Then you shall beg for me.

Fid. With all my heart, Sir.

Man. That is, Pimp for me.

Fid. How, Sir?

Man. D'ye start! Thinkst thou, thou cou'dst do me any other service? Come, no dissembling honour: I know you can do it handsomly, thou wert made for't: You have lost your time with me at Sea, you must recover it.

Fid. Do not, Sir, beget your self more Reasons for your Aversion to me, and make my obedience to you a fault: I am the unfittest in the World, to do you such a service.

Man. Your cunning arguing against it, shews but how fit you are for it, No more dissembling: here, (I say) you must go use it for me, to Olivia. (III, i, 90- 101).

The brutality of Manly's revenge plot is lessened by the unrelenting satire on the legal practice which interrupts the progress of the play to the fulfillment of Manly's plan, and by the foolishness of Oldfox who continues his feeble attempts at winning Blackacre to marriage. The satire moves out into the world and out from Manly's and Olivia's lodgings, from a small circle of acquaintances and their social behavior to the world at large and England's legal institutions. Westminster-Hall, the seat of justice, is according to Freeman, a place where a "Man without Money, needs no more fear a croud of Lawyers, than a croud of Pick-

pockets"(III,i,3-4). Here the scenes are painted in enough detail that it is hard to imagine that Wycherley is not recalling some of his own experience at the Inns of Court. Like the scene from *Love in a Wood*, where Ranger and Vincent passed judgment on the parade of mankind before them, here Manly and others get a chance to do the same. There is no doubt that the Widow Blackacre, the dominant character here, is an accomplice of Wycherley as he reveals the weakness and insensitivities of those that populate the hall.

It is worth noting that none of this advances the plot even a little; its purpose is simply to support a satiric world view and to mitigate the earlier roughness of Manly's threats to "lie with her" for his revenge. The memorable Widow Blackacre, laden with writs and documents and jargon, displays her skills when she comes on stage to add a dimension of lighter comedy to the action by coaching her attorneys before they go off to plead her cases. It is a delightfully satiric look at the practice of justice which in this case is nothing more than delays (Mr. Serjeant), words without sense (Mr. Quaint), intricate arguments that seek to confuse and confound (Mr. Blunder), and a host of other ridiculous practices that make seeking justice impossible.

It is during this expose of a mercenary legal system that we see a change in the character of Manly. After telling Freeman that some of his actions at Westminster have resulted in "three Quarrels and two Law-Suits," Manly demonstrates that he has learned a new way to deal with his world. Rather than deal with those of the legal profession by insulting them to their faces, Manly tries a more witty approach. He rids himself of a Novel,

by suggesting that the two of them go assist Freeman in a quarrel.

Following Novel is Major Oldfox, and then a lawyer. Each one decides to leave when Manly wittily suggests that they be involved in something that he knows has no prospect of material gain. The lawyer, for instance, beats a hasty retreat when Manly asks him to perform legal services without fees. The major difference here is that Manly, like Horner, now allows the fool's actions to pass judgment where before he insisted on doing it himself. This difference in Manly which is readily apparent to the audience is also apparent to Freeman, who notices that Manly has now found a way "to be rid of people without quarrelling" (III,i, 649-50).

Act IV returns us to Manly's lodgings, where we began, this time to see his further decline into hypocrisy and deceit as it regards his *animus* to a single individual and his use of a fragile acquaintance to assist in his revenge. In spite of words of endearment that Manly uses to make her his accomplice, Fidelia knows him well enough to see through the false sincerity in the words, "my dear Voluntier" by saying "How welcome were that kind word too, if it were not for another woman's sake"(IV,i,58-9).

In spite of her reluctance, Fidelia goes to Olivia to petition for Manly. When Fidelia returns it is with a report that Olivia was "kinder" than Manly could wish her to be. The foolishly expectant Manly thinks that Olivia has had a change of heart: "at first, [Olivia] appear'd in rage, and disdain, the truest sign of a coming Woman; but, at last, you prevail'd it seems: did you not?"(IV,i,49-51). Fidelia reports that Manly is Olivia's aversion, and that Olivia would "sooner take a Bedfellow out of an Hospital, and Diseases, into her Arms" (IV,I, 21-2) than him.

This treatment of Manly at Fidelia's hands, while superficially rough and uncomic in the text, has the potential for wonderful comedy in production. First Mrs. Boutel's aside, "So, 'twill work I see"(IV,i,33), signals the audience that Fidelia is trying to take control of her destiny. We must keep in mind that Fidelia is attempting to occupy the place in Manly's heart that he has reserved for Olivia. While Manly objects to the steady flow of details concerning Olivia's intense dislike of Manly, Fidelia refuses to stop, instead piling insult upon insult, ending with the one that is most loathsome to Manly, the name of coward:

Man. So then: well, pr'ythee what said she?

Fid. She said--

Man. What? thou'rt so tedious; speak comfort to me: what?

Fid. That, of all things, you were her aversion.

Man. How?

Fid. That she wou'd sooner take a Bedfellow out of an Hospital, and Diseases, into her Arms, than you.

Man. What?

Fid. That she wou'd rather trust her Honour with a dissolute, debauch'd Hector; nay worse, with a finical baffled Coward, all over loathsom with affectation of the fine Gentleman;

Man. What's all this you say?

Fid. Nay, that my offers of your Love to her, were more offensive, than when Parents wooe their Virgin Daughters, to the enjoyment of Riches onely; and that you were, in all circumstances, as nauseous to her, as a Husband on compulsion.

Man. Hold; I understand you not.

Fid. So, 'twill work I see. [aside]

Man. Did not you tell me--

Fid. She call'd you ten thousand Ruffins.

Man. Hold, I say.

Fid. Brutes--

Man. Hold.

Fid. Sea- monsters--

Man. Dam your intelligence: hear me a little now.

Fid. Nay, surly Coward she call'd you too.

Man. Won't you hold yet? hold, or--

Fid. Nay, Sir, pardon me; I cou'd not but tell you she had the baseness, the injustice, to call you Coward, sir, Coward, Coward, Sir.

Man. Not yet?--

Fid. I've done. Coward , Sir. (IV,i, 16-46)

Her final line, "I've done, Coward, Sir" and her earlier aside suggest the comedy in this attempt to help Manly learn the lesson that he does not seem to want to learn. Manly refuses to accept Fidelia's report of Olivia forwardness with her. Manly insists that the looks that Fidelia found lascivious were really nothing more than a wrong interpretation. It takes a report of the aggressive kissing to cause Manly to damn Olivia for being so false and infamous and to damn his own heart that cannot be false but is so infamous.

It is communication and understanding between the audience and Fidelia that controls the tone of this scene. For one, the audience knows Fidelia to be a woman so Olivia's reported actions, and Manly's visible reactions, make all of his concerns comic. Additionally, Fidelia's attempts to manipulate Manly, to make his match with Olivia seem so hopeless that he will give up his love for her and his idea of revenge, are made comic by the irony noted above, and by her continued communication with the audience via the asides, "So! it works I find as I expected"(IV,i,107).

Manly's now ambivalent feelings, half comic, half tragic, are expressed in his remarks: "Sir? I'm sure I thought her Lips ---but I must not think of 'em more--but yet they are such I coul'd stil kiss,---grow to ---and

then tear off with my teeth, grind 'em into mammocks, and spit 'em into her Cuckold's face" (IV,i,113-16). The brutality of Manly is undercut by Fidelia's very controlled remark to the audience, "Poor man, how uneasie he is! I have hardly the heart to give him so much pain, tho' withall I have him a cure; and to my self new life"(IV,i,117-17).

As Manly orchestrates his revenge, he decides that Fidelia should keep the assignation she promised, but he "will act Love, whil'st [Fidelia] shall talk it only"(IV,i, 148). In spite of Fidelia's attempts to educate him, Manly continues to define his world by his self-interest, rationalizing the dishonour of the act by suggesting that there is honor in revenge. Still unwilling to accept Olivia's obvious culpability, Manly extends his benightedness by suggesting that Fidelia is really his rival in all of this. Fidelia will assuage any fears he has by inviting him to accompany her on the next visit to Olivia's.

To create some suspense, to vary the action, and to mitigate the unhealthy, lustful revenge planned by Manly,³⁰ Wycherley turned again to his subplot peopled by the mercenaries, the litigious fools, and the would-be wits. First we find Oldfox trying to impress Blackacre with his parts by reading some of "the overflowings of my fancy and Pen"(IV,i,221-22). Wycherley very cleverly handles the dialogue with a single word from Oldfox providing the peg for Blackacre to hang her legal jargon on. This foolishness is interrupted by the defiant return of Jerry, farcically dressed

³⁰Ben Ross Schneider, *The Ethos of Restoration Comedy*, p. 161. Schneider discusses love and lust as they relate to rape in Restoration comedy.

in a gaudy suit and red breeches reminiscent of the visual farce of *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*, who now declares his freedom from the widow. This is followed by the wit comedy, with its demonstration of the folly of the fools and the duplicity and meanness of Olivia. In a scene that seems pointless to Chadwick,³¹ we see Lord Plausible and Novel on the receiving end of a form letter that describes each rival as detestable, and promises love only to its reader. While the scene is not required to move the action along, it is another illustration of Olivia's attempt to manipulate her world, and another scene with a light comic tone. It also gives Wycherley a chance to show that Plausible has learned a truth that Manly has yet to learn; that Olivia is like a glass reflecting back a satisfying image of self: "She stands in the Drawing-room, like the Glass, ready for all Comers to set their Gallantry by her: and, like Glass too, lets no man go from her, unsatisfi'd with himself"(IV,ii,94-6).

Just as the alternating from one plot to another is beginning to grow tiresome, Wycherley gives Manly his revenge.³² With her apartment successfully cleared, the lustful Olivia awaits Fidelity's scheduled visit. But unexpectedly Vernish, her husband, returns from his journey, enters the room, and is mistaken for Fidelity by Olivia who kisses him. Olivia quickly discovers her mistake and addresses the audience in a comic aside, saying

³¹Chadwick, *The Plays of William Wycherley*, p. 179.

³²Percy G. Adams, "What Happened in Olivia's Bedroom? or Ambiguity in *The Plain Dealer*," *Essays in Honor of Esmond Linworth Marilla*, ed. Thomas Austin Kirby, and William John Olive (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), pp. 174-87.

"have I been throwing away so many kind Kisses on my Husband, and wrong'd my Lover already?"(IV,i, 118-20) Once she dissembles around this mistake, acting the part of a loving wife, she convinces Vernish that he must protect the money they have taken from Manly by going to the goldsmith who has it and removing it immediately. Even though she has just lied about how she missed him, she is instantly finding a way to get him out of her lodging. His leaving gives her a moment to comment to the audience that she has now both "secur'd money and pleasure".

Fidelia, with Manly following behind, now enters Olivia's darkened lair to her licentious embraces and kisses. The rough and surly, Manly is reduced to providing a commentary on Olivia's behavior while Fidelia attempts to fend off another woman's embraces. There is clearly comedy in our knowing that Fidelia is working hard to prevent Olivia's advances, as she questions Olivia's commitment in earshot of Manly. When Fidelia says she fears ill-treatment like that suffered by Manly, Olivia admits that she never loved Manly, for "he that distrusts most the World, trusts most to himself, and is but the more easily deceiv'd, because he thinks he can't be deceived"(IV,ii,201-03). It would have been hard to love such a "dogged, ill-manner'd, . . . surly, untractable, snarling Brute." (IV,ii, 210-212). She admits that she dissembled love because she had a passion for his money. The comic Fidelia asks Manly aside, "D'ye hear her, Sir?" A director might feel like stressing the ugly mercenary side of Olivia here and showing Manly writhing in emotional pain. But the fact is that it is Olivia's lustful side that is being dramatized, and in her haste to seduce Fidelia, she casually throws off responses to Fedelia's inquiries. There is

comedy inherent in a situation that has Manly being insulted simultaneous with Fidelia's assault.

In typical Restoration fashion the action is further complicated by more mistaken identity. Unbeknownst to Olivia, Manly follows her into her bedchamber to get revenge, first by lying with her, and "then to let her know it"(IV,ii,260). After some time offstage he returns telling Fidelia that his revenge will not be complete without witnesses. To prevent the discovery of the wrong done to Olivia, he asks Fidelia to go in and "act the second part of a Lover: that is, talk kindness to her" (IV,ii,295-6). Manly promises the reluctant Fidelia that "we will never part as long as we live" if she does this for him. If Fidelia represents the virtuous, it is a sense of honor easily compromised when her self interest hangs in the balance. But as before, this kind of objection has no place in the world of this comedy. Wycherley is not asking us to judge Fidelia's participation. As part of his play he is asking us to accept her as an unwilling accomplice. As Fidelia reluctantly complies, Vernish returns, Olivia escapes, and Fidelia is confronted by an angry cuckold.

From the comedy of the woman advancing on a woman disguised as a man, we move to the combination suspense of a man preparing to fight a man who is really a woman. As Fidelia leaves she encounters Vernish returning. Fidelia lets the audience know what she thinks when she says "O Heavens! more fears, plagues, and torments yet in store!" (IV,ii,347). Thus Wycherley establishes the suspense of what is a very threatening situation, made more threatening for him at first mistaking her for a man and her fear because she is a woman. Vernish, fearing that he is a cuckold,

draws his sword and promises revenge for "the greatest injury in the World" (IV,ii, 354). But the suspense is short lived for soon comedy again takes over. Fidelia asks him to send the man downstairs and she will show him that she could not injure him, and the comic discovery scene that the audience anticipated from the start is upon it. Once the man leaves, she confesses that she is a woman. Vernish "Pulls off her peruke, and feels her breasts," as he comically says "here are Witnesses of 't too, I confess."(IV,i, 361-2). And in a typically Restoration comedy illustration of opportunity, Vernish comments to the audience, "Well, I'm glad to find the Tables turn'd, my Wife in more danger of Cuckolding, than I was" (IV,ii,363-4). Vernish pulls Fidelia toward his bed to have further testimony to her sex, but is interrupted by the arrival of the alderman. While there is some darkness in the rape and suspense in the sword play, it is continually undercut by the comedy of the breeches part, by the discovery of Fidelia's sex, by the direct address to the audience, and finally the timing of the alderman's visit.

Here knowledge of production practices, convention, and the text make it clear that the action that took place offstage earlier was a successful rape. When Vernish reveals that the "man" he caught her with was a woman, we can imagine the lustful Olivia almost insistent in her declaration to the audience that "My Husband may be deceiv'd but I'm sure I was not"(V,i,41-2). This is much in the way that Margery Pinchwife reacted to the report of Horner's impotence with "for to my certain knowledge." Later Fidelia asks Manly, "What shou'd you go again, Sir, for?"(V,ii,14) making it clear that he has already had his revenge. Olivia even impatiently comments to Fidelia at their last meeting later on that she

awaits "the satisfaction of abusing [Vernish] again tonight" (V,iii,23-4) implying that he was cuckolded the previous night. Later when Manly tells Vernish that he has bedded Olivia, Vernish is doubtful but comments that Manly "does not use to lye" (V,ii,337). It is also in keeping with Wycherley's sense of poetic justice, and the character of Manly. After all Manly is not going to change until he can free himself of his need for revenge by having his revenge. And having it at the expense of one like Olivia does not make us despise him for the act.

The final act with its unconventional resolution opens at Eliza's lodging. Olivia fearing that her infidelity has been discovered, lets her cousin know that for once the world's censure might be too much to deny. When Vernish enters the stage she seems finally trapped, but when he reveals what he knows, and she quickly assumes a new role and "fastens a quarrel on him" by suggesting that he has ravaged Fidelity. Eliza, who now understands all that has transpired, compliments Olivia on her deception following the quick turn of events, but Olivia is so a part of what she pretends to be that she continues to plead her innocence in front of a witness to the whole conversation.

When Vernish departs he goes to see Manly, a meeting that the audience has been waiting for since it was told of the marriage. When Vernish enters to Manly's ironic greeting, "here is a Friend indeed; and he that has him in his arms, can know no wants"(V,ii, 90-1), the audience knows Manly's folly. But the tables are quickly and comically turned on Vernish, when Manly reveals that he has lain with Olivia. The dissembled anger that Vernish had directed at Olivia in support of his "friend," has

turned to real anger now that he fears he is a cuckold. As Vernish's suspicions grow, the audience wants Manly to have his revenge.

After resolving the Freeman-Widow Blackacre subplot, Wycherley gives Manly and the audience its revenge, Manly his transformation, Fidelia her man, Freeman his money, and Vernish and Olivia each other in the final discovery scene. After leaving the Cock tavern where he has heard of Olivia's infidelity, the suspicious Vernish decides to pretend to be out of town again tonight to test Olivia. Meanwhile Manly has Freeman and the others coming to witness Olivia's shame, "for the more Witnesses I have of her infamy, the greater will be my revenge" (V,ii,362-3). To put his plan in motion, he and Fidelia enter Olivia's dark apartment. Immediately the lascivious Olivia begins her advances, but she is interrupted by noises at the door. Olivia decides to retreat hastily with Manly's money and in the process of the escape, momentarily hands Manly his gold. At this point Vernish breaks in with his sword drawn, and a fight ensues with Manly. Vernish is finally overcome, exposed and Manly is apparently made to look more foolish for the fleecing by a second trusted friend.³³ But this is again a case where Olivia's farcical groping in the dark for Fidelia, where the intrigue, the sword play, the revelation that Fidelia is a woman, the discovery of Vernish as Olivia's husband, all combine to obliterate any interest in Manly and Vernish. Furthermore if Manly is viewed comically

³³Peter Holland, *The Ornament of Action*, p. 201. Holland concludes that "at the moment of revelation Manly is shown to be a fool. However many different types of characters he may have embraced before, rake, hero, wit, sensualist, hypocrite, his ignorance about Vernish makes him a fool complete."

throughout, and not seen as a morally outraged tragic hero who is transformed into a sentimental lover, the added betrayal at the hands of Vernish is even less jarring.

In what some call the killing of Manly, Manly keeps his promise to Fidelia and offers her his heart and his money. It turns out that Fidelia has two thousand pounds a year from her father and that she left pretenders to follow Manly "having in several publick places seen you, and observ'd your actions thoroughly with admiration" (V,iii,145-6). The catharsis of the final scene has given Manly the sensitivity to know that she loves him. He has been purged of his misanthropy by his revenge, the recovery of his fortune, and the example and commitment of a true friend.

III

The Plain Dealer: An Assessment

It is easy to see why the Restoration audience was puzzled by a play like *The Plain Dealer*; it is a challenge to understand Manly, and to square his presentation with the general social satire of the Olivia-Novel-Plausible subplot and the legal satire of the Blackacre farce. But the Restoration audience had some assistance that an audience today lacks. For one, the various actors, Hart, Cory, Marshall and Knepp, are in roles that were familiar to the audience. Second, it knew that the play contained more comedy than modern critics have chosen to see. Additionally the audience was used to plays that mixed a variety of character types and

dissimilar lines of action. It therefore accepted the conventions of the day, and overlooked what might be perceived today as "inconsistencies".

Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer* is a play with much that is common to Wycherley and much that is common to Restoration theater, but also something that is unique.³⁴ It has Wycherley's standard ingredients: farce, melodrama, wit, sex, interesting humours character, and satire. It has characters from different social strata: humours, wit, and romantic types. And even though Wycherley borrowed the play's premise from Moliere, he has made it more English by naming more London places and specifics, like its legal jargon, its types, its proverbs, and and even its comic drama. And like *The Country Wife*, it has a main character whose presence dominates. What is unique is a character like Manly who is infused with a life that blends the conventional and the personal.

Like *The Country Wife*, where the exposition was completed for the most part via introductions made before the characters have entered the stage, in *The Plain Dealer* we are treated to commentaries on Major Oldfox, Jerry and Widow Blackacre before we meet them. In addition to the help that Wycherley gave it, the Restoration audience was familiar with stereotypical Restoration characters like these. Once we know their humours and we see them in action their future actions are predictable. The same is true with the wits and would-be wit characters, like Novel, and

³⁴ Hume makes a persuasive case for this play resting outside the normal categories of plays that have been deduced from a large body of Restoration comedy. It is so different from other material that it defies classification. pp. 335-37.

Plausible, both easily understood in the context of the play. Even important characters like Eliza and Olivia are easily understood because in many ways this is a play that relies on our accepting the conventional. We cannot wonder why Fidelity befriends Manly, we must just accept that she does.

But the play is not without its challenging characters--Fidelity, Freeman, and Manly. Fidelity almost belongs to the early grouping of conventional characters, except for Wycherley's interesting injection of some comically manipulative characteristics. While not a humourous character, Fidelity is, as we have already mentioned, a symbol of virtue in a world that cannot recognize it. But she is more than a symbol at times. Like other Wycherley creations she has her moments when she takes on a life beyond the range of that which she represents. We saw in the bedroom scene at Olivia's the way that Fidelity used her questions to help shake Manly out of love with Olivia. She wittily coaxes Olivia's denigration of Manly to help her own cause. We saw how she quoted Olivia at length to torment Manly for the same reason in Act III. Fidelity is at times clearly an active agent in her quest to be Manly's beloved. She earns our sympathy early as a convention and then wins it anew and with greater commitment as she stands by Manly through all of his ups and downs. By the play's end, her match with Manly is both the author's resolution and the audience's expectation.

Freeman, as his name suggests, is not restricted by money or lack of, or by the law, and is free to make his way where he can. He is an interesting contrast to Manly in many ways. Unlike Manly who is passive in the face of his world, unable to ask for a commission, and unable to ask

for financial assistance, Freeman throws himself into a world that he does not particularly like, but that can provide sustenance none-the-less. He demonstrates skill at distinguishing a knave from a friend, a skill that Manly's fanaticism prevents him from possessing. Unlike Manly, Freeman's definition of friendship admits of more than one, and includes a reasonable level of tolerance for the follies and vices of mankind. Freeman uses the fools for fun and diversion and to meet his needs, like Horner, Harcourt, Ranger, Gerrard and Hippolita before him. And like Horner, Freeman is not interested in reforming the world; he simply takes advantage of the weaknesses of those around him to serve his own end, but unlike Horner he actively pursues the weak. Freeman seems to believe that if he cannot change his world, then he can at least accept it and make sure that he will not suffer at its hands.

When Freeman and Manly discuss social ceremony, Manly's idealistic position is that the world will be better if everyone "plain-dealed," and because it does not, he is "proud that the World and I think not well of one another"(I,i,281-2). For the pragmatic Freeman, on the other hand, always telling the truth is a "quality as prejudicial, to a man that wou'd thrive in the World, as square Play to a Cheat or true Love to a Whore! Would you have a man speak truth to his ruine? You are, severer than the Law, which requires no man to swear against himself"(I,i,240-43). The severity of Manly's position is made clear by Freeman's comment that even though Manly is for plain-dealing, Freeman has against Manly's "particular Notions, . . . the practice of the whole World"(I,i,283-4). In much the same way that it is tempting to see the Harcourt as a hero of *The Country Wife*

because he represents moderation and commitment, it is tempting to see Freeman as a comic hero³⁵ because he represents a mean position between the misanthropic Manly and the all-pleasing indiscriminate Plausible. But Freeman's activities in the at-times-disjointed Blackacre subplot make it clear that while he is not attacked he is also not presented as a hero.

That role is reserved for Manly, the cause of a good deal of the confusion and puzzlement about *The Plain Dealer*. Some like Holland think Manly is a dupe,³⁶ but this point of view does not take into account the obvious transformation that occurs in him. For at least the first act, Manly is too extreme in his positions to be any thing but a dupe. He is even described by his associates as "unmannerly," as an "arrant sea ruffian." and as a "brutal, mad man." It is true early on that "Manly is a recognizable comic type . . . whose incidental social criticism may often be valid even though it is too uncontrolled."³⁷ Manly is a humourous character obsessed with the notion that the world is wrong and he is right.

During the process of demonstrating Manly's reconciliation with his world, we see a character self-deceived who comes to self-knowledge

³⁵Birdsall, *Wild Civility*, pp. 158-77. Birdsall's thesis is that "if all of Wycherley's complex preoccupations in the play really center upon [a] ridicule-severity opposition, the opposition may be still more meaningfully defined in terms of a comedy-satire confrontation, and that if Manly is the 'satiric spokesman,' then Freeman is the 'comic spokesman' with the two men actually playing the role of 'adversarius' to each other" (p. 158).

³⁶Norman Holland, *The First Modern Comedies*, p. 98.

³⁷Chorney, "Wycherley's Manly Reinterpreted," p. 169.

and is rewarded with a virtuous woman and a fortune. His transformation is clearly delineated. He starts as an idealist who wants the world to live by an absolute standard of honesty and truth that makes him unfit for life on the shore. The problem is readily apparent: the standard that Manly applies is based on his own pride. Further, it is Freeman and Eliza's moderate positions on the same world that make "partial self-indulgent nonsense"³⁸ of Manly's desire to escape mankind. And finally, his public righteousness acceptably delineated early in Act I is made foolish by Olivia's comic imitation of it in Act II.

The most obvious difference between *The Plain Dealer* and *The Misanthrope* is that Manly starts where Alceste ends. Except for our short-lived sympathy with his point of view, Manly is early-on the butt of the satire: he has left his world to escape his problems, and his self deception has made him believe that drastic action is preferable to personal change. Because his escape has failed, and his love has proved unfaithful, Manly becomes more bitter and more disenchanted.

His disappointment at Olivia's hands takes him from his rage to the depths of despair, the desire for revenge and a state of hypocrisy where he must hide what he truly feels. He will share his love of Olivia and his desire for revenge with the audience, but none of his fellow man, except ironically the woman who loves him: "I cou'd out-rail a bilk'd Whore or a kick'd Coward; but now I think on't that were rather to discover my love, than hatred; and I must not talk, for something I must do (II,i,221-4). By

³⁸Cohen, "The Alternating Styles of *The Plain Dealer*," p. 24.

this point in the action Manly is a disappointed idealist. When Manly admits to Fidelia that he has dissembled his hatred for Olivia, he shows that no matter how committed to honesty it is almost impossible not to falter, and his faltering is in a much more dishonorable way in that it involves physical violence, where the others are minor sins against sincerity.

In the context of the action, Manly's personal anger and bitterness, and the violence of his revenge are subordinate to the tone of actions and attitudes of the other characters, including Fidelia who helps keep the proper perspective in front of the audience during almost all of Manly's scenes. By the end of the play Manly comes finally to accept that "there are now in the World/ Good-natur'd Friends, who are not Prostitutes" and fortune seekers and dissemblers. In the end we do not condemn him for his hypocrisy, but instead understand his actions as the outgrowth of a such a corrupt world. But Wycherley did not intend that bitterness to dominate. Manly's shipwreck brings him back and Wycherley shows in a conventional way that the experience of life can be a maturing process.

What then is the conclusion that we reach about Manly. He is both a comic misanthrope and a satiric spokesman in the reading.³⁹ In the acting, however, Manly is a character undergoing a transformation whose disappointment causes violent up and downs. His winning wealth, the commitment of a woman with integrity, the friendship of Freeman, revenge on those that sought to destroy him, all strongly suggest that Wycherley

³⁹K.M. Rogers, "Fatal Inconsistency: Wycherley and *The Plain Dealer*," *ELH*, 28 (1961), pp. 148-62.

wants us to understand him. Rogers correctly states that Wycherley treats "Manly sometimes as a satiric butt and sometimes as a romantic hero with whom one is to sympathize uncritically."⁴⁰ That would have been the Restoration theater audience's tendency. His lack of bitter anger at Olivia and Vernish during the final scene strikes some as uncharacteristic of Manly but these forget that the final scene with its sword play, discovery, is the crashing down of the illusion and delusions of Manly in one fell swoop. Wycherley has not simply killed off Manly, Manly has killed off his old self. He has not dwindled into the "boring antithesis of what he has been,"⁴¹ nor is the ending a "banalization of the satire." Manly ends as the satiric spokesman--his criticisms valid, his attempt to live them unrealistically prideful.

Manly's initial brutal honesty and temper give the play a sardonic tone, but moderating the sardonic in the play is a variety of dialogue, juxtaposed actions, comic characters and situations, audience asides and dramatic irony. Often critics overlook the production aspects that make this evidence important. As in *The Gentleman Dancing Master* and *The Country Wife* the thrust of physical violence is offset by the comedy of breeches, the recognition scenes and the asides. As we have seen throughout Wycherley's four plays, "there are two levels of perception demanded of the

⁴⁰Rogers, "Fatal Inconsistency: Wycherley and *The Plain Dealer*," p. 162.

⁴¹Cohen, "The Alternating Styles of the *The Plain Dealer*," p. 25.

spectator as he watches the inner play and hears so many external comments [asides]."⁴²

In addition to overlooking the production aspects that mitigate some of Manly's anger, many critics fail to note the side of Manly that is not angry. It is interesting that in most discussions of the play with which I am familiar, for instance, that no mention is made of Freeman's description of Manly as a man with many friends and relatives who love him. Critics tend to focus on his misanthropy, paying little if any attention to comments than run counter. Little mention is made of Fidelia's interest in following Manly because of the great reputation he has in the world, even though most critics accept Fidelia and her adoration of Manly. Those that argue that this demonstrates her own naivete, or a flaw in her character, do not understand that she is a conventional character in two respects: as a breeches part, and as a "romantic" heroine.

The Plain Dealer is then an attack on Wycherley's favorite targets, affectation, hypocrisy, and the proud, self-reliance that deceptions like these create. *The Plain Dealer* is "a satire at the expense of a generally corrupt society, as it is seen through the eyes of a man who [is] comically honest."⁴³ It is also about the discrepancy between the standards that

⁴²Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance*, p. 205.

⁴³See A. M. Friedson, "Wycherley and Moliere: Satirical Point of View in *The Plain Dealer*," p. 193. Friedson gives a nice summary of the variety of attitudes toward Manly and argues correctly that society is finally the butt of the satire and not Manly, much in the way that society and not Horner is the object of attack in *The Country Wife*. Friedson adds that Manly is "never allowed to take the satiric focus from social sham."

fashionable society proclaim and those that it actually lives by." It is about what creates misanthropy and not misanthropy itself. The play satirizes those that pervert the law, those that are social and moral hypocrites, those that judge others and not themselves.

If we chose to speculate on the biographical implications of *The Plain Dealer* we could not help but consider the prologue, spoken by Manly, the dedication and the defense of *The Country Wife* that appears in Act II, all of which attack a world dominated by hypocrisy and affectation, and all of which link Wycherley to the play and to Manly. It is tempting to conclude as Birdsall does that "Manly's views certainly represent those which the playwright held himself."⁴⁴ While the defence of the china scene serves to expose the hypocrisy of Olivia, it also gave Wycherley the chance to attack those who attacked his play that he believed were just as hypocritical. Olivia reveals her own lascivious associations with the name of Horner when she asks, "does it not give you the rank conception; or image of a boat, a Town-bull, or a Satyr? (II,i, 414-15) and from there the association builds to what such filthy creature do," as their defiling of honest Mens Beds and Couches, Rapes upon sleeping and waking countrey Virgins, under Hedges, and in Haycocks"(II,i,422-24). She cannot resist talking about the filth, concluding that worse than the name Horner, the "lewddest, filthiest thing is his China," (II,i, 433-34) it's lewd enough, and she virtuous enough, that she "was fain to break all [her] defil'd vessels" (II,i, 437). Eliza's response is "You'll pardon me, I cannot think the worse of my

⁴⁴Birdsall, *Wild Civility*, p. 173.

China, for that of the Playhouse"(II,i,439-40). It is almost as if Wycherley used this play to defend his own dramatic practice from those who like Manly applied an inappropriate standard. As the Horatian motto says, "Ridicule commonly decides greater matters more forcibly and better than severity."

With *The Country Wife*, we saw Wycherley reach a state of artistic control using old themes and character types and stock situations. By *The Plain Dealer*, he is using much the same ingredients though he is unable to control them as well. In many ways it appears the conventional comedy about a strong isolated hero who finally finds love and happiness in his world. But it is a comedy that is darkening around the edges because there is too much of Wycherley that colors it. It is a comedy that causes problems with interpretation because it is the story of Manly confused by a collection of witty and farcical scenes that are tangential to the main action.

VI

CONCLUSION

This study of the plays of William Wycherley began by asking if factual information about Wycherley's theatrical milieu could narrow the range of critical controversy that surround *The Country Wife* and *The Plain Dealer*, and could inform readings of the less controversial *Love in a Wood* and *The Gentleman Dancing-Master*.

A review of some of the evidence available on the Restoration theater audience between the opening of the theaters in 1660 and the merger of the two acting companies in 1682 provides information that makes clear that Wycherley's audience was not the stereotypical and seemingly constant homogeneous audience that many critics assume for the whole of Restoration theater. While this study has sketched Wycherley's audience in some detail, it is admittedly only a sketch. Additional research in primary sources might turn up specific information about theater audiences but it is unlikely that it would ever appear in quantities sufficient to establish once and for all a more specific theater make-up than

has been sketched here. It is also debateable whether additional historical information would affect critical assessments. Suffice it to say, however, that we can reasonably conclude, as we have, that a courtly aristocratic audience for Wycherley at least is a myth, and further, that Wycherley wrote with the knowledge that his audience and its needs were changing throughout his theatrical career.

Our look both at dramatic practice and theory during the period did not successfully define a standard comic form. Defining a standard theory of comedy is, I am convinced, a difficult if not impossible task. The difficulty in precisely defining operative words like "wit," "satire," and the difficulty in tracing developing and contradictory theoretical remarks, make this task more than challenging. Rather our findings did suggest that in spite of the rubrics "Restoration comedy" and "comedy of manners," the comedy that played the theaters in London between 1660 and 1682 was varied and ever-changing. During Wycherley's short career much that was popular was imitated and as much was created anew. As this concerns Wycherley, it is fair to say that he owes a debt to some of his contemporaries for elements in *Love in a Wood*. His second play appears to be an attempt to correct the lessons of his first, and his last two plays, particularly in the case of *The Plain Dealer*, to shape comedies that are uniquely his creations.

While this investigation did not result in a theory of comedy that Wycherley may have subscribed to, it did show the extent to which even the

varied genres and subgenres relied on conventions that were known both to the actors and the audience during this period. So that even if Wycherley's plays defy classification, at least the conventional aspects that are now known have helped narrow the range of interpretative options.

A third area of extra textual speculation involved the acting techniques, and effect of the existing stable of actresses and actors that were well known to Wycherley and his contemporaries. This is an issue raised during the process of discussing the play and the performance possibilities, and one that deserves more careful research. It is obvious to most of the critics and historians that write on this subject that Restoration comedy is unlike any theater familiar to the modern theater-goer. One historian has said that in order for a director, an actor, and I will add a reader, to breathe life into Restoration comedy an "instinctive understanding of the stage of the period and its relation to the audience who frequented it"¹ are musts. My reliance on the work of J. L. Styan makes clear the importance of the contribution made by critics who can help recreate a past theatrical environment.

It is my belief that the plays of William Wycherley, and I am sure many of his contemporaries, are better understood when pertinent extra-textual evidence is brought to bear on the text. When reading these plays it is imperative that we imagine the intimate theaters, with a forestage that

¹Hugh Hunt, "Restoration Acting," in *Restoration Theater*, ed. John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1965), p. 192.

made the stage one with the pit. We must try to image the initial fascination with actresses, and as difficult as it may be, the allure of the suggestive breeches parts. We need to understand how the Restoration theater-goer reacted to characters continually breaking whatever illusion existed to address the audience directly in the ubiquitous asides. To do so we need to continually refer to the body of data that makes clear that the Restoration theater milieu was unique.

How has this information helped our understanding the plays of Wycherley? Initially, it makes clear that *Love in a Wood* is not crowded because Wycherley did not know better. When we see it as a play in the popular mixed mode, we can better understand the demands Wycherley was addressing. When seen as a play for a predominately city audience interested in music, dance and farce, *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* is a wonderful play that surely needs to be seen or at least accurately visualized.

When we come to the two problem plays, *The Country Wife* and *The Plain Dealer*, the audience and contemporary dramatic practice are less relevant. By this time, we must rely on Wycherley's practice, as we understand it, and relevant information on actors, actresses and production practices to help us narrow the range of critical discussion that in some cases is clearly ludicrous. In this process, characters like Fidelia and Alithea are analyzed by the proper conventional criteria, while others, like Horner, are free to exist outside the world of the play and outside the judgement of Wycherley and the audience.

If anything, placing Wycherley's plays in their contemporary context gives us a better appreciation of his ability to be both a man of his times and a man for all times. In spite of the general ignorance of production practices and Restoration dramatic conventions, countless people appreciate Wycherley's skill at comedy. His control of timing, his interesting humours characters, and his few creations, like Horner and Manly, that engage us three hundred years later.

Wycherley was a man committed to entertaining his audience by cleverly recreating situations that were relevant for his time and for ours. True, he was at times celebrating a libertine lifestyle. At the same time, however, he lent a seriousness of purpose to his work that makes it engaging today. His look at affectation and hypocrisy and its unique presentation are what remain for our entertainment and scrutiny.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

- Appleton, William W. *Beaumont and Fletcher, A Critical Study*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1956.
- Beljame, Alexandre. *Men of the Letters and the English Public in the Eighteenth Century, 1660-1744, Dryden, Addison, Pope*. Translated by E.O. Lorimer. Ed. by Bonamy Dobree. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1948.
- Birdsall, Virginia Ogden. *Wild Civility: The English Comic Spirit on the Restoration Stage*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970.
- Boswell, Eleanore. *The Restoration Court State, 1660-1702*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932.
- Burton, K.M.P. *Restoration Literature*. London: Hutchinson, 1958.
- Chadwick, William, R. *The Four Plays of William Wycherley*. The Hague: Mouton. 1975.
- Connely, Willard. *Brawny Wycherley: First Master in English Modern Comedy*. London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930.
- Dobree, Bonamy. *Restoration Comedy, 1660-1720*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924.
- Downes, John. *Roscus Anglicanus, or an Historical Review of the Stage*. Ed. Arthur Freeman. New York: Garland Publishing, 1949.
- Dryden, John. *The Works of John Dryden*, 19 vols. Eds. E.H. Hooker, H.T. Swedenberg. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956-87.
- Friedman, Arthur. *The Plays of William Wycherley*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1979.

- Fujimura, Thomas H. *The Restoration Comedy of Wit*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1952.
- Holland, Norman N. *The First Modern Comedies: The Significance of Etherege, Wycherley and Congreve*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959.
- Holland, Peter. *The Ornament of Action: Text and Performance in Restoration Comedy*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- Hooker, E.N. ed. *Critical Works of John Dennis*. 2 vols. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1939.
- Hotson, Leslie. *The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage*. New York: Russell and Russell, 1962.
- Hughes, Leo. *A Century of English Farce*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956.
- Hume, Robert D. *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976.
- Krutch, Joseph Wood. *Comedy and Conscience after the Restoration*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1949.
- Langbaine, Gerard. *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets (1691)*. Ed. Arthur Freeman. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1973.
- Lynch, Kathleen M. *The Social Mode of Restoration Comedy*. New York: MacMillan, 1926.
- McCarthy, B. Eugene. *William Wycherley: A Biography*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1979.
- Miles, Dudley H. *The Influence of Moliere on Restoration Comedy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1910.
- Nicoll, Allardyce, *Restoration Drama, 1660-1700*, Vol. I of *A History of English Drama, 1660-1900*. Cambridge: University Press, 1965.
- Palmer, John. *The Comedy of Manners*. London: G. Bell and Sons, 1913.
- Perromat, Charles. *William Wycherley: Sa vie - Son oeuvre*. Paris, 1921.

- Perry, H.T.E. *The Comic Spirit in Restoration Drama: Studies in the Comedy of Etherege, Wycherley, Congreve, Vanburgh and Farquhar*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925.
- Pinto, Vivan de Sola. *Rochester, Portrait of a Restoration Poet*. London: John Lane, 1972.
- Rogers, Kathleen. *William Wycherley*. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1972.
- Rosenhiem, Edward W. Jr. *Swift and the Satirist's Art*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963.
- Schneider, Ben Ross Jr. *The Ethos of Restoration Comedy*. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1971.
- Scouten, Arthur, H, and Avery Emmett, L. eds. *The London Stage, 1660-1700: A Critical Introduction*. Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968.
- Shadwell, Thomas. *The Complete Works of Thomas Shadwell*. Ed. Montague Summers. London: The Fortune Press, 1927.
- Smith, J.H. *The Gay Couple in Restoration Comedy*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1948.
- Styan J.L. *Restoration Comedy in Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Summers, Montague. *The Restoration Theater*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1934.
- _____. *The Playhouse of Pepys*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1935.
- Underwood, Dale. *Etherege and the Seventeenth-Century Comedy of Manners*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957.
- Weales, Gerald, ed. *The Complete Plays of William Wycherley*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1966.
- Wilcox, J. *The Relation of Moliere to Restoration Comedy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1938.
- Wilkinson, D.R.M. *The Comedy of Habit: An Essay of the Use of Courtesy Literature in a Study of Restoration Comic Drama*. Leiden: Universitaire Pers, 1964.

Wilson, John H. *The Influence of Beaumont and Fletcher on Restoration Drama*. Columbus, Ohio: State University Press, 1928.

_____. *The Court of Wits of the Restoration: An Introduction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948.

_____. *All the King's Ladies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.

Zimbardo, Rose A. *Wycherley's Drama: A Link in the Development of English Satire*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1965.

Articles

- Adams, Percy G. "What Happened in Olivia's Bedroom? or Ambiguity in *The Plain Dealer*." In *Essays in Honor of Esmond Linworth Marilla*, pp. 174-187. Edited by Thomas Austin Kirby, and William John Olive. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970.
- Auffert, J.M. "*The Man of Mode* and *The Plain Dealer*: Common Origins and Parallels." *Etudes Anglaises*, 19 (1966), pp. 209-222.
- Avery, Emmett L. "Rhetorical Patterns in Restoration Prologues, and Epilogues." In *Essays in American and English Literature presented to Bruce R. McElderry*, pp. 221-37. Edited by Max Schultz, 1967.
- Bateson, F.W. "L.C. Knights and Restoration Comedy." *Essays in Criticism*, 7 (1957), pp. 56-67.
- Bear, A.S. "Criticism and Social Change: The Case of Restoration Drama." *KOMOS*, 1 (1969), pp. 22-31.
- Berkeley, David S. "The Pervinent Rake in Restoration Comedy." *MP*, 49 (1952), pp. 223-233.
- _____. "Preciosite and the Restoration Comedy of Manners." *HLQ*, 18 (1954), pp. 109-128.
- _____. "The Art of 'Whining' Love." *SP*, 52 (1955), pp. 478-496.
- Berman, Ronald. "The Ethic of *The Country Wife*." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 9 (1967), pp. 47-55.
- Blakeslee, Richard C. "Wycherley's Use of the Aside." *Western Speech*, 28 (1964), pp. 212-217.
- Boswell, Eleanore. "Wycherley and the Countess of Drogheda." *TLS*, (November 28th, 1929).
- _____. "William Wycherley." *MLR*, 26 (1931), p. 345.
- Bowman, John S. "Dance, Chant and Mask in the Plays of Wycherley." *Drama Survey*, 3 (1963), pp. 181-205.

- Cecil, D.C. "Libertine and *Precieux* Elements in Restoration Comedy." *Essays in Criticism*, 9 (1959), pp. 239-253.
- Chadwick, W.R. "William Wycherley: The Seven Lean Years." *N&Q*, (January, 1971), pp. 30-34.
- Chorney, Alexander H. "Wycherley's Manly Reinterpreted." In *Essays Critical and Historical Dedicated to Lily B. Campbell*, pp. 161-169. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1950.
- Cohen, Derek. "The Alternating Styles of the *The Plain Dealer*." *RECTR*, 2, 1987, pp. 19-37.
- Craik, T.W. "Some Aspects of Satire in Wycherley's Plays." *English Studies*, 41 (1960), pp. 168-179.
- Donaldson, Ian. "Tables Turned: *The Plain Dealer*." *Essays in Criticism*, 17 (1967), pp. 304-321.
- Dorman, Peter J. "Wycherley's Adaptation of *Le Misanthrope*." *Restoration and Eighteenth Century Theater Research*, 8 (1969), pp. 54-59.
- Friedson, A.M. "Wycherley and Moliere: Satirical Point of View in *The Plain Dealer*." *MP*, 64 (1967), pp. 189-97.
- Hallet, Charles A. "The Hobbesian Substructure of *The Country Wife*." *PLL*, 9 (1973), pp. 380-395.
- Hume, Robert. "Reading and Misreading *The Man of Mode*." *Criticism*, 14 (1972), pp. 1-11.
- Jackson, Wallace. "*The Country Wife*: The Premises of Love and Lust." *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 72 (1973), pp. 540-46.
- Kaufman, Anthony. "Idealization, Disillusion, and Narcissistic Rage in Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer*." *Criticism*, 21 (1979), pp. 119-133.
- Knights, L.C. "Restoration Comedy: The Reality and the Myth." In *Restoration Drama: Modern Essays in Criticism*, pp. 3-19. Edited by John Loftis. New York: Oxford University Press, 1966.
- Leech, Clifford. "Restoration Comedy: The Earlier Phase." *Essays in Criticism*, 1 (1951), 165-184.

Love, Harold. "The Myth of the Restoration Audience."
KOMOS, 1 (1967), pp. 49-56.

_____. "Bear's Case Laid Open: or, a Timely Warning to
Literary Sociologists." *KOMOS*, 2 (1969), pp. 72-
80.

_____. "State Affairs on the Restoration Stage, 1660
-1675." *Restoration and Eighteenth Century Theater
Research*, 14 (1975), pp. 1-9.

McDonald Charles O. "Restoration Comedy as Drama of
Satire: An Investigation into Seventeenth Century
Aesthetics." *SP*, 61 (1964), 522-544.

Matlack, Cynthia. "Parody and Burlesque of Heroic
Ideals in Wycherley's Comedies: A Critical
Reinterpretation of Contemporary Evidence." *PLL*, 8
(1972), pp. 273-86.

Montgomery, Guy. "The Challenge of Restoration
Comedy." In *Restoration Drama: Modern Essays in
Criticism*, pp. 32-43. Edited by John Loftis. New
York: Oxford University Press, 1966.

Mukherjee, Sujit. "Marriage as Punishment in the Plays
of Wycherley." *A Review of English Literature*, 7
(1966), pp. 61-64.

Righter, Anne. "William Wycherley." In *Restoration
Dramatists: A Collection of Critical Essays*, pp.
105-22. Edited by Earl Miner. Englewood Cliffs,
N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1966.

_____. "The Satiric Design in *The Plain Dealer*." *Studies
in English Literature*, 1 (1961), pp. 1-18.

Rogers, K.M. "Fatal Inconsistency: Wycherley and *The
Plain Dealer*." *ELH*, 28 (1961), pp. 148-162.

Rump, Eric S. "Theme and Structure in Wycherley's *Love
in a Wood*." *English Studies*, 54 (1973), pp.326-33.

Smith, John Harrington. "Shadwell, the Ladies, and the
Change in Comedy." *MP*, 46 (1948), pp. 22-34.

Stoll, Elmer Edgar. "The *Beau Monde* at the
Restoration." *MLN*, 49 (1934), pp. 425-33.

Taylor, Archer. "Proverbs in the Plays of William
Wycherley." *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, 21 (1957),
pp. 213-17.

- Veith, David. "Wycherley's *The Country Wife*: An Anatomy of Masculinity." *Papers in Language and Literature*, 2 (1966), pp. 335-50.
- Vernon, P.F. "Marriage of Convenience and the Moral Code of Restoration Comedy." *Essays in Criticism*, 12 (1962), pp. 370-87.
- Wain, John. "Restoration Comedy and its Modern Critics." *Essays in Criticism*, 6 (1956), pp. 367-85.
- Williams, Edwin. "Dr. James Drake and Restoration Theory of Comedy." *RES*, 15 (1939), pp. 180-191.
- Zimbardo, Rose A. "The Satiric Design in *The Plain Dealer*." *Studies in English Literature*, 1:3 (1961), pp. 1-18.

APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Robert C. Neagle has been read and approved by the following committee:

Dr. Douglas White, Director
Professor, English, Loyola

Dr. John S. Shea
Associate Professor, English, Loyola

Dr. Thomas Kaminski
Associate Professor, English, Loyola

The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Date

4/12/89

Director's Signature

Douglas H. White